

India's Timeless Culture

Its Power and Charm

Here is an old anecdote with a contemporary significance:

'Sir, how did you find Indians?' asked a tourist official to a departing foreign visitor in an Indian airport. 'Where are they?' the visitor snapped back. 'I met Tamilians, Kannadigas, Telugus, Malayalis, Bengalis, Punjabis, Marathis, Gujaratis, Assames . . . but "Indians"? Well . . . did not get to meet many.'

Perhaps, something similar would be said of Indian culture. Where is Indian culture, which part of India? There is culture specific to Tamilians, Kannadigas, Telugus, Malayalis, Bengalis, Punjabis, Marathis, Gujaratis, Assames, and so on, but which is the *Indian* culture?

It is plain fact: while regional colours of India's cultural tapestry are quite visible, the national character of Indian culture is not easily discernible and understandable. This is true not only of the fascinated visitors from outside India but also of most Indians themselves.

Nor is it easy to get a truly pan-Indian view of Indian culture. India! Diversity is thy name. With a mind-boggling variety in customs, manners, beliefs, traditions, languages, ceremonies, arts, dances, music, architecture, cuisines and family values, and a history spread over several millennia, is it easy to fathom and evaluate India's cultural heritage for an ordinary

person? It requires much patience, sympathy and effort to uncover the real nature and character of the Indian culture. And despite its diversity, there is an underlying unity, an ever-present thread that runs through all forms of its cultural heritage—south Indian or north Indian or any other Indian. There is influence of regional, historical, geographical and other factors on its forms and expressions, but a silent spirit of unity pervades the whole of Indian culture.

Deep, profound and lasting, this unique culture does not lend itself so easily to curiosity-seekers and observers-in-a-hurry. But once it does, it captures their hearts. Forever.

Swami Vivekananda pointed it out more than a hundred years ago,

To many, Indian thought, Indian manners, Indian customs, Indian philosophy, Indian literature are repulsive at the first sight; but let them persevere, let them read, let them become familiar with the great principles underlying these ideas, and it is ninety-nine to one that the charm will come over them, and fascination will be the result. Slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of the calm, patient, all-suffering spiritual race upon the world of thought.¹

This, then, is the first thing to remember about Indian culture—its spiritual nature. It is like gentle dew, silent and unseen. Like spirituality, it is beyond gross eyes. And in

understanding the Indian culture, let us seek help and guidance from Swami Vivekananda about whose grasp of this subject was succinctly expressed by Rabindranath Tagore, when he advised French Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland, thus:

If you want to understand India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative.

Indeed, 'everything is positive' in Swamiji.

Seeing Through Swami Vivekananda's Eyes

If one needs Swamiji to understand India, one also needs, first, to understand Swamiji himself, in some measure at least. Writing of the factors that shaped Swamiji's thoughts and world-view, Sister Nivedita stated in her introduction to the nine-volume *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,

These, then—the Shastras, the Guru, and the Motherland—are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekananda. These are the treasure which it is his to offer. These furnish him with the ingredients whereof he compounds the world's heal-all of his spiritual bounty. These are the three lights burning within that single lamp which India by his hand lighted and set up, for the guidance of her own children and of the world.²

These 'three lights', which mingled in a powerful lamp called Swami Vivekananda's mind, are:

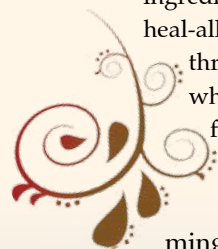
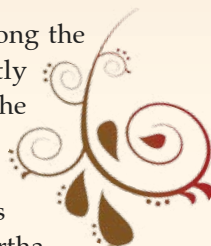
First, he had his spiritual training under the great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. It is Sri Ramakrishna who nurtured and gently stoked

young Naren's divine spark to a flame. And Sri Ramakrishna himself was 'consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.'

Second, Swamiji's keen and uncompromising intellect led to his study of scriptures, questioning and analysing them, understanding the central theme of India's timeless wisdom contained in their words. And he left no area unexplored.

Third, Swamiji himself went along the length and breadth of India, mostly on foot, mingling and living with the people of all walks of life and thus gathering first-hand the experience of the diversity and richness that is Indian culture. Swamiji's Indian tirtha-yatra finally brought him to Kanyakumari, in the southern-most tip of India, where he sat for three days—immersed in the thought of India, 'the queen of his adoration.' Swamiji's biography says,

There, sitting on the last stone of India, he passed into a deep meditation on the present and future of his country. He sought for the root of her downfall. With the vision of a seer he understood why India had been thrown from the pinnacle of glory to the depths of degradation. Where only wind and surf were to be heard, he reflected on the purpose and achievement of the Indian world. He thought not of Bengal, or of Maharashtra, or of the Punjab, but of India and the life of India. The centuries were laid out before him. He perceived the realities and potentialities of Indian culture. He saw India organically and synthetically, as a master-builder might visualize in the concrete an architect's plans. He saw religion



to be the life-blood of India's millions. 'India', he realized in the silence of his heart, 'shall rise only through a renewal and restoration of that highest spiritual consciousness that has made her, at all times, the cradle of the nations and cradle of the Faith.' He saw her greatness: he saw her weaknesses as well—the central one of which was that the nation had lost its individuality. To his mind, the only hope lay in a restatement of the culture of the Rishis. Religion was not the cause of India's downfall; but the fact that true religion was nowhere followed: for religion, when lived, was the most potent of all forces.³

Thus, who else could guide us to understand Indian culture better than Swamiji!

What Swamiji Said of Indian Culture

Swami Vivekananda was very proud of Indian culture. But he was no emotional, impulsive admirer. Far from being an upbeat fan, his understanding was based on a deep study of the hard facts of history and core issues of Indian culture. Added to it was his spiritual training and personal experience.

He said of India,

The debt which the world owes to our Motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much as to the patient Hindu, the mild Hindu . . . Civilisations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient times and in modern times, great ideas have emanated from strong and great races . . . In ancient and in modern times, seeds of great truth and power have been cast abroad by the advancing tides of national life; but mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and with the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. . . This, in the main, other nations have taught; but India has for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did

not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of the modern Europeans lived in the forests and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live.⁴

Nor is Indian culture restricted to its present landmass called India. It extends beyond its political and geographical boundaries. The whole of Southeast Asia has something in common. Since 1940s, the term *Southeast Asia* has been used to refer to the common culture that pervades this vast area. Southeast Asia means the area to the east of India and to the south of China, which includes the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, the Malay Archipelago and Cambodia, roughly forming a circle from Burma through Indonesia to Vietnam. Before the term *Southeast Asia* became common, the region was often described as *Greater India*. The history of Indian cultural expansion covers a period of more than fifteen hundred years in these areas. The famed Angkor Wat temple complex, largest of its kind in the world, in Cambodia, and the Prambanan Shiva Temple in Indonesia are two impressive examples of this.

Culture—Its Deeper Meaning

The word culture cannot and should not be limited to cultural programmes and fests! It is much more pervasive and closer. Culture, beginning from 'personal culture' to 'collective or racial, social, national culture' contains within it many shades and colours. Of course, the one simple meaning of *culture* is 'to cultivate', to refine and to evolve. In

this sense, it covers one's manners, etiquettes, festivals, food, dance, architecture—practically all aspects of our day-to-day life. If culture is a growth and a process of refinement, it's most immediate manifestation is in the word 'civilization' (i.e., material aspect of life, and organized living and working). According to Swamiji, spirituality is the core of culture, and culture is the core of civilization. He said,

The more advanced a society or nation is in spirituality, the more is that society or nation civilised. No nation can be said to have become civilised only because it has succeeded in increasing the comforts of material life by bringing into use lots of machinery and things of that sort. The present-day civilisation of the West is multiplying day by day only the wants and distresses of men. On the other hand, the ancient Indian civilisation, by showing people the way to spiritual advancement, doubtless succeeded, if not in removing once for all, at least in lessening, in a great measure, the material needs of men.⁵

Swami further said,

It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. You can put a mass of knowledge into the world, but that will not do it much good. There must come culture into the blood.⁶

Spirituality and Indian Culture

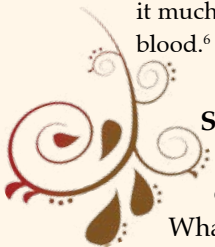
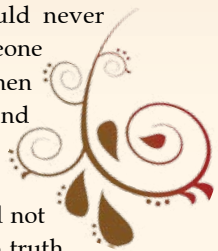
Spirituality is the outcome of living a life centred in dharma.

What is dharma? 'That which holds life together'. Dharma is not a set of dogmas and beliefs but the working of a universal cosmic order which keeps life together, leading man to ultimate freedom from all limitations. And Swami Vivekananda believed that freedom is what every religion tries to aim at. He traces how the whole journey of man's dream of freedom finally finds its fulfillment in experiencing the Self:

The search for freedom is the search of all religions; whether they know it or not, whether they can formulate it well or ill, the idea is there. Even the lowest man, the most ignorant, seeks for something which has power over nature's laws . . . Everywhere we see this assertion of freedom, this freedom of the soul. It is reflected in every religion in the shape of God or gods; but it is all external yet—for those who only see the gods outside. Man decided that he was nothing. He was afraid that he could never be free; so he went to seek for someone outside of nature who was free. Then he thought that there were many and many such free beings, and gradually he merged them all into one God of gods and Lord of lords. Even that did not satisfy him. He came a little closer to truth, a little nearer; and then gradually found that whatever he was, he was in some way connected with the God of gods and Lord of lords; that he, though he thought himself bound and low and weak, was somehow connected with that God of gods. Then visions came to him; thought arose and knowledge advanced. And he began to come nearer and nearer to that God, and at last found out that God and all the gods, this whole psychological phenomenon connected with the search for an all-powerful free soul, was but a reflection of his own idea of himself. And then at last he discovered that it was not only true that 'God made man after His own image', but that it was also true that man made God after his own image. That brought out the idea of divine freedom. The Divine Being was always within, the nearest of the near. Him we had ever been seeking outside, and at last found that He is in the heart of our hearts.⁷

This grand idea of religion is at the root of Indian culture.

Spirituality and culture are synonyms in the Indian context. To be cultured, in the highest sense, is to be spiritual. The more advanced a culture becomes, the more spiritual



it becomes because spirituality is the hallmark of a highly evolved mind. Spirituality is the manifestation of the fruits which mankind gains when it seeks the infinite, tries to breakdown all limitations and barriers. It engulfs all mankind in its embrace and excludes none. A spiritually strong person and nation naturally becomes tolerant and inclusive. As Swamiji put it,

The world is waiting for this grand idea of universal toleration. It will be a great acquisition to civilisation. Nay, no civilisation can long exist unless this idea enters into it. No civilisation can grow unless fanaticism, bloodshed, and brutality stop. No civilisation can begin to lift up its head until we look charitably upon one another; and the first step towards that much-needed charity is to look charitably and kindly upon the religious convictions of others. Nay more, to understand that not only should we be charitable, but positively helpful to each other, however different our religious ideas and convictions may be. And that is exactly what we do in India . . . It is here in India that Hindus have built and are still building churches for Christians and mosques for Mohammedans. That is the thing to do. In spite of their hatred, in spite of their brutality, in spite of their cruelty, in spite of their tyranny, and in spite of the vile language they are given to uttering, we will and must go on building churches for the Christians and mosques for the Mohammedans until we conquer through love, until we have demonstrated to the world that love alone is the fittest thing to survive and not hatred, that it is gentleness that has the strength to live on and to fructify, and not mere brutality and physical force.⁸

Hence, in the Indian perspective, one cannot demarcate or separate culture from spirituality. Whenever one refers to Indian culture, one is invariably referring to spirituality in its various forms. In this sense,

bharatiya samskriti, Indian culture, is *manava samskriti*, the culture of Man for spirituality is the search for, and attainment of, the essential nature of man which is divine. To destroy Indian culture, thus, is to destroy spirituality itself! This, of course, cannot happen. As Swamiji said,

Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. The power of suffering is infinitely greater than the power of doing; the power of love is infinitely of greater potency than the power of hatred.⁹

In another place Swamiji mentions¹⁰ 'All poetry, painting, and music is feeling expressed through words, through colour, through sound. . .' And when the heart, the seat of feelings, is purified, all poetry, painting and music will exude purity, exude spirituality.

Beyond the Popular Culture

Despite all materialism and consumerism that seem to engulf Indian society and political and economic thinking, this timeless culture continues to survive, nay, thrive. It has a powerful presence.

Yet there are many questions to be answered. 'Where is Indian culture? Where is it to be found? Is there any thing called "culture" still left?'—a young Indian, working in MNC or software industry might ask today. Yet when he meets his parents or marries or sets up a home or has to perform last rites of his dear ones, his inherent Indian roots sprout

up.¹¹ Not only when he is in India, but also when he migrates to other lands in search of better prospects.

Let us remember that there is a culture beyond what the popular films and politics depict or deplore. Highly adaptive and assimilative and yet extremely orthodox, conventional and stubborn, this timeless culture has assumed and will continue to adapt to new forms. Whether it is learning Indian classical music through Skype, or digitising Upanishads or Puranas, or revival in spoken Sanskrit, or devising ways to help the non-resident Indians through e-pujas or e-darshans, or creating new Bhajan and Vedic websites, opening of Indian restaurants, or building temples in Washington, Chicago, London, Australia and so on—there is no dying for this timeless culture. The more the materialism, let us be sure, the more significance and appeal Indian culture will have to people across the world.

Rubbing its shoulders with modernity and progressive models of living, the Indian culture is a living force. Despite several false notions and accretions that may have covered its pristine beauty in places, the matchless appeal of Indian culture is a fact of experience. Having firmly established itself in spirituality, the Indian culture continues to live and thrive. And, like spirituality, it will continue to live and thrive for eternity.

A Special Issue

This special issue of the Vedanta Kesari attempts to put together many aspects of Indian culture. Of course, we have the scholarly and comprehensive eight volumes of the *Cultural Heritage of India*, published from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, and many other works of value and depth. But what we have tried to do in this issue is what the popular Hindi proverb says, *gagar main sagar*—‘putting ocean in a pitcher!’ How can a vast and diverse culture such as Indian culture be put in a slender volume as this!

Yet there is a need which has to be met—considering the fast-paced life today’s generation has faced with. The fundamental ideas and ideals of Indian culture such as Upanishads, Yoga, meditation, and so on have been presented. There are also articles on the influence of Indian culture on economics, architecture, tradition of dining and so on. We thank the contributors for their valuable writings. This issue also tries to provide snippets of Indian culture through short write ups under the column, *Imprints of a Living Culture*. Prepared at the Vedanta Kesari office with generous input from Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopaedia, they are aimed at the young or time-starved readers who wish to get a bird’s eye-view of the Indian cultural traditions. For the first time in the history of our monthly, we are bringing out the entire issue in multicolour.

We are glad to dedicate this issue to Swami Vivekananda on his 150th birth Anniversary that is being celebrated across



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| 8. CW, 3:188 | 9. CW, 4:348 | 10. CW, 7:31 | 11. see <i>Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture And Identity</i> by Pavan K. Varma, Penguin | | | |

Simhâvalokanam

From the Archives of THE VEDANTA KESARI

(May, 1970, Pp. 47)

Dharma, the Basis of Indian Culture

SWAMI SAKHYANANDA



In Sanskrit language, culture may be called *samskriti*, the refined perfected state of our character, in which *buddhisatvam*, the principle of intelligence in human personality, functions in harmony with the Universal Spirit, that is Satyam-Sivam-Sundaram (Truth-Benignity-Beauty) Infinite. This high state of human perfection where character attains its full blossom is the fulfillment of all human aspirations and endeavour to become full by realising the unity of all life in oneself, the supreme spirit divine. . .

The term 'culture' may be better understood by its Sanskrit equivalent Samskriti (*Samskara*); Indian culture is Bharatiya Samskriti. The Sanskrit root *Samskri* means to refine, to purify, and Samskriti is the state of having been refined, having been made pure, having become free from all dross. The word 'culture' conveying the same sense, is derived from its Latin root *cultura*, meaning tillage, improvement, or refinement, as is seen in the term agriculture. *agri* (*agre*) is land (soil), and culture is the process of tilling and refining the soil by the removal of weeds, thorns and stones so as to make it suitable for the growth of food-crops. Again, pure metal is extracted from the ore by the removal of foreign elements through different processes of refinement—powdering, sieving, melting, blowing, etc.

Similarly, when the term culture is used in relation to human beings, it should mean the refined, purified state of the 'being' of man, his *sattvam* as expressed in Sanskrit. What is this *sattvam*, the being of man, which is subject to refinement? And to what extent is a refinement of it possible? On the answer to these questions depends any right definition of 'culture'. Naturally, thinking men differ in their understanding of the terms, the being of man, the extent of its refinement, etc., and hence we have different views in the matter. Without clear insight, deep and broad enough to view life in its totality, no healthy definition of culture, universal in its application, can be given. Only Vedanta, the Upanishadic thought of India, has that vision of oneness, the vision of the unity of all life in One Eternal Principle of Life. It is therefore worthwhile to study the implications of culture in the light of Vedanta, the traditional Indian view-point.

According to the view of Vedanta, the Atman, or the Self of man, the real essence of our being, is ever-pure, eternally perfect and unchangeable. It is 'Sat-Chid-Ananda (Truth-Knowledge-Bliss Infinite). The *sattvam*—to be more exact, the *buddhisattvam*—is the upadhi, or the limiting adjunct which constitutes man's apparent being as an individual, and determines his character and conduct in relation to the world of objects outside. In this worldly life of subject-object

relationship, the buddhisattvam, with 'I'-consciousness as its Magde, the described instrument of faculty of man to carry on the various subjective functions of perceiving, feeling, willing, and acting, knowing, acting and reacting. It is therefore called the *antarindriya*, or *antahkarana* — the inner organ of man.

There are various other terms in Sanskrit to denote, partially or wholly, the different functions of this inner being of man: for example, *chitta* — the mind or mind-stuff, *hrid* (*hridaya*)—the heart, *chetana*, — the conscious life-principle or the soul, — all these terms represent the buddhisattvam in its different functions.

It is also sometimes called *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body, or the psyche, as distinct from the gross physical body of matter. All that is expressed in the character of man as true knowledge and bliss, all that is beautiful and sublime, all that is good and great, really belong to the Self which is Spirit Divine (Sat-Chid-Ananda-Atma).

The buddhisattvam, by virtue of its intrinsic serenity, reflects, as it were, the glory of the Atman, and finds expression as omniscience, omnipotence, perfect peace and bliss. This original state of purity *par excellence*, where the character of man is perfection all-round, is the ideal state of our being, the end and aim of all life; it is the realisation of the unity and harmony of all life in oneself. . .



Trimurty, Elephanta Caves, near Mumbai

timeless culture and help us to hold on to its evolution takes place involuntarily and is governed by natural laws. But, in human beings in whom the will and reasoning faculties are developed, conscious effort is required, and the progress of evolution depends on the proper exercise of the will-power. Hence the need of relentless struggle for cutting asunder the binding force of ignorance.

Vidya which is true knowledge *par excellence* is the counter-force to avidya. When, by earnest and concentrated effort, and by proper training in the path of Vidya, the impure element of ignorance is removed, sattvam attains its mature state of refinement, and manifests the glory of the Spirit Divine in all its perfection. The effort to purify the sattvam by the application of Vidya is real Education—Vidyabhyasa, and the resulting state of purity and perfection is Culture. In Sanskrit, it is called Sattva-samsuddhi or Sattva-samskriti. We may, therefore, reasonably define culture as the refined, perfected state of human character in which it functions in harmony with the Universal Spirit that is Sat-Chid-Ananda—Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Infinite.

This is the ideal of culture India has been holding, not only for her national life, but for all humanity; in that ideal is to be seen the end of the whole process of cultural evolution by the fulfilment of all human aspirations in the endeavour to become perfect. □



The Wonders of Indian Culture

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

India—the Land of Multiplicity

India is a vast continent, not merely a country, and is inhabited by many different races. The nations of Europe are nearer to each other, more similar to each other, than the races in India. You may get just a rough idea of it if I tell you that there are eight different languages in all India. Different languages—not dialects—each having a literature of its own. The Hindi language, alone, is spoken by 100,000,000 people; the Bengali by about 60,000,000, and so on. Then, again, the four northern Indian languages differ more from the southern Indian languages than any two European languages from each other. They are entirely different, as much different as your [American] language differs from the Japanese, so that you will be astonished to know, when I go to southern India, unless I meet some people who can talk Sanskrit, I have to speak to them in English. Furthermore, these various races differ from each other in manners, customs, food, dress, and in their methods of thought.¹

When you study the civilisation of India, you find that it has died and revived several times; this is its peculiarity. Most races rise once and then decline for ever. There are two kinds of people: those who grow continually and those whose growth comes to an end. The peaceful nations, India and China, fall down, yet rise again; but the others, once they go down, do not come up—they die. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall enjoy the earth.²

The Historical 'Discovery' of India

Of all the causes which have worked for the present state of human civilisation from the ancient

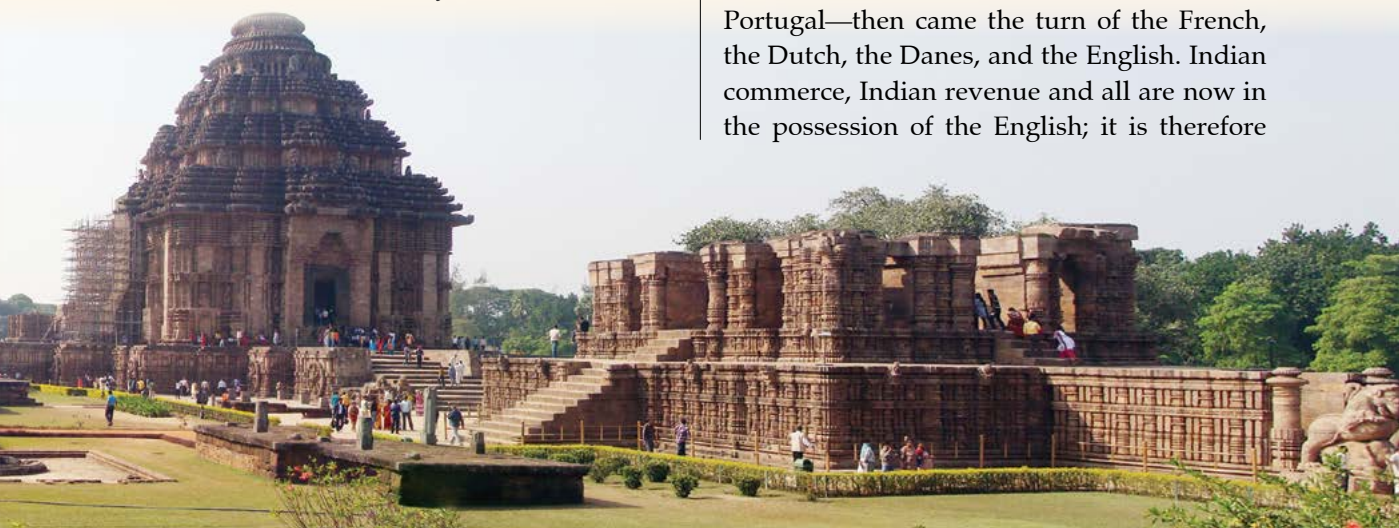
times, the commerce of India is perhaps the most important. From time immemorial India has beaten all other countries in point of fertility and commercial industries. Up till a century ago, the whole of the world's demand for cotton cloth, cotton, jute, indigo, lac, rice, diamonds, and pearls, etc., used to be supplied from India.

Moreover, no other country could produce such excellent silk and woollen fabrics, like the kincob, etc., as India. Again, India has been the land of various spices such as cloves, cardamom, pepper, nutmeg, and mace. Naturally, therefore, from very ancient times, whatever country became civilised at any particular epoch, depended upon India for those commodities. This trade used to follow two main routes—one was through land, via Afghanistan and Persia, and the other was by sea—through the Red Sea.

After his conquest of Persia, Alexander the Great despatched a general named Niarchus to explore a sea-route, passing by the mouth of the Indus, across the ocean, and through the Red Sea. Most people are ignorant of the extent to which the opulence of ancient countries like Babylon, Persia, Greece,

and Rome depended on Indian commerce. After the downfall of Rome, Baghdad in Mohammedan territory, and Venice and Genoa in Italy, became the chief Western marts of Indian commerce. And when the Turks made themselves masters of the Roman Empire and closed the trade-route to India for the Italians, then Christopher Columbus (Christobal Colon), a Spaniard or Genoese, tried to explore a new route to India across the Atlantic, which resulted in the discovery of the American continent. Even after reaching America, Columbus could not get rid of the delusion that it was India. It is therefore that the aborigines of America are to this day designated as Indians. In the Vedas we find both names, 'Sindhu' and 'Indu', for the Indus; the Persians transformed them into 'Hindu', and the Greeks into 'Indus', whence we derived the words 'India' and 'Indian'. With the rise of Mohammedanism the word 'Hindu' became degraded and meant 'a dark-skinned fellow', as is the case with the word 'native' now.

The Portuguese, in the meantime, discovered a new route to India, doubling Africa. The fortune of India smiled on Portugal—then came the turn of the French, the Dutch, the Danes, and the English. Indian commerce, Indian revenue and all are now in the possession of the English; it is therefore



that they are the foremost of all nations now. But now, Indian products are being grown in countries like America and elsewhere, even better than in India, and she has therefore lost something of her prestige. This the Europeans are unwilling to admit. That India, the India of 'natives', is the chief means and resources of their wealth and civilisation, is a fact which they refuse to admit, or even understand. We too, on our part, must not cease to bring it home to them.³

The Contributions of Ancient India

Indian society [was] so great that a Greek historian who wrote about India of that time was led to say that no Hindu was known to tell an untruth and no Hindu woman was known to be unchaste.⁴

This is the peculiarity of the Indian mind, that when anything interests it, it gets absorbed in it and other things are neglected. You know how many sciences had their origin in India. Mathematics began there. You are even today counting 1, 2, 3, etc. to zero, after Sanskrit figures, and you all know that algebra also originated in India, and that gravitation was known to the Indian thousands of years before Newton was born.⁵

India has given to antiquity the earliest scientific physicians, and, according to Sir William Hunter, she has even contributed to modern medical science by the discovery of various chemicals and by teaching you how to reform misshapen ears and noses. Even more it has done in mathematics, for algebra, geometry, astronomy, and the triumph of modern science—mixed mathematics—were all invented in India, just so much as the ten numerals, the very cornerstone of all present civilization, were discovered in India, and are in reality, Sanskrit words.

In philosophy we [Indians] are even now head and shoulders above any other nation, as Schopenhauer, the great German philosopher, has confessed. In music India gave to the world her system of notation, with the seven cardinal notes and the diatonic scale, all of which we enjoyed as early as 350 B.C., while it came to Europe only in the eleventh century. In philology, our Sanskrit language is now universally acknowledged to be the foundation of all European languages, which, in fact, are nothing but jargonized Sanskrit.

In literature, our epics and poems and dramas rank as high as those of any language; our *Shakuntala* was summarized by Germany's greatest poet, as 'heaven and earth united'. India has

given to the world the fables of Aesop, which were copied by Aesop from an old Sanskrit book; it has given the Arabian Nights, yes, even the story of Cinderella and the Bean Stalks. In manufacture, India was the first to make cotton and purple [dye], it was proficient in all works of jewelry, and the very word 'sugar', as well as the article itself, is the product of India. Lastly she has invented the game of chess and the cards and the dice. So great, in fact, was the superiority of India in every respect, that it drew to her borders the hungry cohorts of Europe, and thereby indirectly brought about the discovery of America.

. . . It [India] does not beg for mercy at the hands of any nation. Our only fault is that we cannot fight to conquer; but we trust in the eternity of truth. India's message to the world is first of all, her blessing; she is returning good for the evil which is done her, and thus she puts into execution this noble idea, which had its origin in India. Lastly, India's message is, that calm goodness, patience and gentleness will ultimately triumph. For where are the Greeks, the one-time masters of the earth? They are gone. Where are the Romans, at the tramp of whose cohorts the world trembled? Passed away. Where are the Arabs, who in fifty years had carried their banners from the Atlantic to the Pacific? And where are the Spaniards, the cruel murderers of millions of men? Both races are nearly extinct; but thanks to the morality of her children, the kinder race [Indian] will never perish, and she will yet see the hour of her triumph.⁶

There is no philosophy in the world that is not indebted to Kapila. Pythagoras came to India and studied this philosophy, and that was the beginning of the philosophy of the Greeks. Later, it formed the Alexandrian school, and still later, the Gnostic. It became

divided into two; one part went to Europe and Alexandria, and the other remained in



India; and out of this, the system of Vyasa was developed. The Sankhya philosophy of Kapila was the first rational system that the world ever saw. Every metaphysician in the world must pay homage to him. I want to impress on your mind that we are bound to listen to him as the great father of philosophy. This wonderful man, the most ancient of philosophers, is mentioned even in the Shruti: 'O Lord, Thou who produced the sage Kapila in the beginning.' How wonderful his perceptions were, and if there is any proof required of the extraordinary power of the perception of Yogis, such men are the proof. They had no microscopes or telescopes. Yet how fine their perception was, how perfect and wonderful their analysis of things!⁷

An Outsider's View of India

People who are capable of seeing only the gross external aspect of things can perceive in the Indian nation only a conquered and

suffering people, a race of dreamers and philosophers. They seem to be incapable of perceiving that in the spiritual realm India conquers the world. No doubt it is true that just as the too active Western mind would profit by an admixture of Eastern introspection and the meditative habit, so the Eastern would benefit by a somewhat greater activity and energy.

Still we must ask: What may be that force which causes this afflicted and suffering people, the Hindu, and the Jewish too (the two races from which have originated all the great religions of the world) to survive, when other nations perish? The cause can only be their spiritual force. The Hindus are still living though silent, the Jews are more numerous today than when they lived in Palestine. The philosophy of India percolates throughout the whole civilised world, modifying and permeating as it goes. So also in ancient

communication with the rest of the world, thus disproving the belief that Indians never went outside of their own country.⁸

The one characteristic of Indian thought is its silence, its calmness. At the same time the tremendous power that is behind it is never expressed by violence. It is always the silent mesmerism of Indian thought. If a foreigner takes up our literature to study, at first it is disgusting to him; there is not the same stir, perhaps, the same amount of go that rouses him instantly. Compare the tragedies of Europe with our tragedies. The one is full of action, that rouses you for the moment, but when it is over there comes the reaction, and everything is gone, washed off as it were from your brains. Indian tragedies are like the mesmerist's power, quiet, silent, but as you go on studying them they fascinate you; you cannot move; you are bound; and whoever has dared to touch our literature has felt the

bondage, and is there bound for ever. Like the gentle dew that falls unseen and unheard, and yet brings into blossom the fairest of roses, has been the contribution of India to the thought of the world. Silent, unperceived, yet omnipotent in its effect, it has revolutionised the thought of the world, yet nobody knows when it did so. (CW, 3: 274)



The Indian Quest for God

It is remarkable also that the possession of India by a foreign power has always been a turning-point in the history of that power, bringing to it wealth, prosperity, dominion, and spiritual ideas. While the Western man tries to measure

times, her trade reached the shores of Africa before Europe was known, and opened

how much it is possible for him to possess and to enjoy, the Eastern seems to take the

opposite course, and to measure how little of material possession he can do with. In the Vedas we trace the endeavour of that ancient people to find God. In their search for Him they came upon different strata; beginning with ancestor worship, they passed on to the worship of Agni, the fire-god, of Indra, the god of thunder, and of Varuna, the God of gods. We find the growth of this idea of God, from many gods to one God, in all religions; its real meaning is that He is the chief of the tribal gods, who creates the world, rules it, and sees into every heart; the stages of growth lead up from a multiplicity of gods to monotheism. This anthropomorphic conception, however, did not satisfy the Hindus, it was too human for them who were seeking the Divine. Therefore they finally gave up searching for God in the outer world of sense and matter, and turned their attention to the inner world.

Is there an inner world? And what is it? It is Atman. It is the Self, it is the only thing an individual can be sure of. If he knows himself, he can know the universe, and not otherwise. The same question was asked in the beginning of time, even in the Rig-veda, in another form: 'Who or what existed from the beginning?' That question was gradually solved by the Vedanta philosophy. The Atman existed. That is to say, what we call the Absolute, the Universal Soul, the Self, is the force by which from the beginning all things have been and are and will be manifested.⁹

Indian Idea of Existence

According to our Indian system, there are two existences: nature on the one side and the Self, the Atman, on the other. By the word nature is meant not only all this external world, but also our bodies, the mind, the will, even down to what says 'I'. Beyond all that is the infinite life and light of the soul—the Self,

the Atman. . . According to this philosophy the Self is entirely separate from nature, always was and always will be. . . There never was a time when the spirit could be identified even with the mind. . .

It is self-evident that the food you eat is manufacturing the mind all the time. It is matter. The Self is above any connection with food. Whether you eat or not does not matter. Whether you think or not . . . does not matter. It is infinite light. Its light is the same always. If you put a blue or a green glass [before a light], what has that to do with the light? Its colour is unchangeable. It is the mind which changes and gives the different colours. The moment the spirit leaves the body, the whole thing goes to pieces.¹⁰

. . . In India there is quite a different idea. [There] religion means realisation, nothing else. It does not matter whether one approaches the destination in a carriage with four horses, in an electric car, or rolling on the ground. The goal is the same. . . For the Indians it is how to become what they really are, to regain their lost Selfhood. . .¹¹

The Scriptures of India

Upanishads have become the Bible of modern India. The Hindus have the greatest respect for the Karma Kanda of the Vedas, but, for all practical purposes, we know that for ages by Shruti has been meant the Upanishads, and the Upanishads alone. We know that all our great philosophers, whether Vyasa, Patanjali, or Gautama, and even the father of all philosophy, the great Kapila himself, whenever they wanted an authority for what they wrote, every one of them found it in the Upanishads, and nowhere else, for therein are the truths that remain for ever.¹²

Unfortunately there is the mistaken notion in modern India that the word

Vedanta has reference only to the Advaita system; but you must always remember that in modern India the three Prasthanas are considered equally important in the study of all the systems of religion. First of all there are the Revelations, the Shrutis, by which I mean the Upanishads. Secondly, among our philosophies, the Sutras of Vyasa have the greatest prominence on account of their being the consummation of all the preceding systems of philosophy. These systems are not contradictory to one another, but one is based on another, and there is a gradual unfolding of the theme which culminates in the Sutras of Vyasa. Then, between the Upanishads and the Sutras, which are the systematising of the marvellous truths of the Vedanta, comes in the Gita, the divine commentary of the Vedanta.¹³

The Ideal of Indian Women

Now, the ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother. As children, every day, when we are boys, we have to go early in the morning with a little cup of water and place it before the mother, and mother dips her toe into it and we drink it.

In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there—as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes: the wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.

Now, I only suggest comparisons; I would state facts so that we may compare the two sides. Make this comparison. If you

ask, 'What is an Indian woman as wife?', the Indian asks, 'Where is the American woman as mother? What is she, the all-glorious, who gave me this body? What is she who kept me in her body for nine months? Where is she who would give me twenty times her life, if I had need? Where is she whose love never dies, however wicked, however vile I am? Where is she, in comparison with her, who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her a little badly? O American woman! where is she?' I will not find her in your country. I have not found the son who thinks mother is first. When we die, even then, we do not want our wives and our children to take her place. Our mother!—we want to die with our head on her lap once more, if we die before her. Where is she? Is woman a name to be coupled with the physical body only? Ay! the Hindu mind fears all those ideals which say that the flesh must cling unto the flesh. No, no! Woman! thou shalt not be coupled with anything connected with the flesh. The name has been called holy once and for ever, for what name is there which no lust can ever approach, no carnality ever come near, than the one word mother? That is the ideal in India.¹⁴

The Secret of Indian Culture

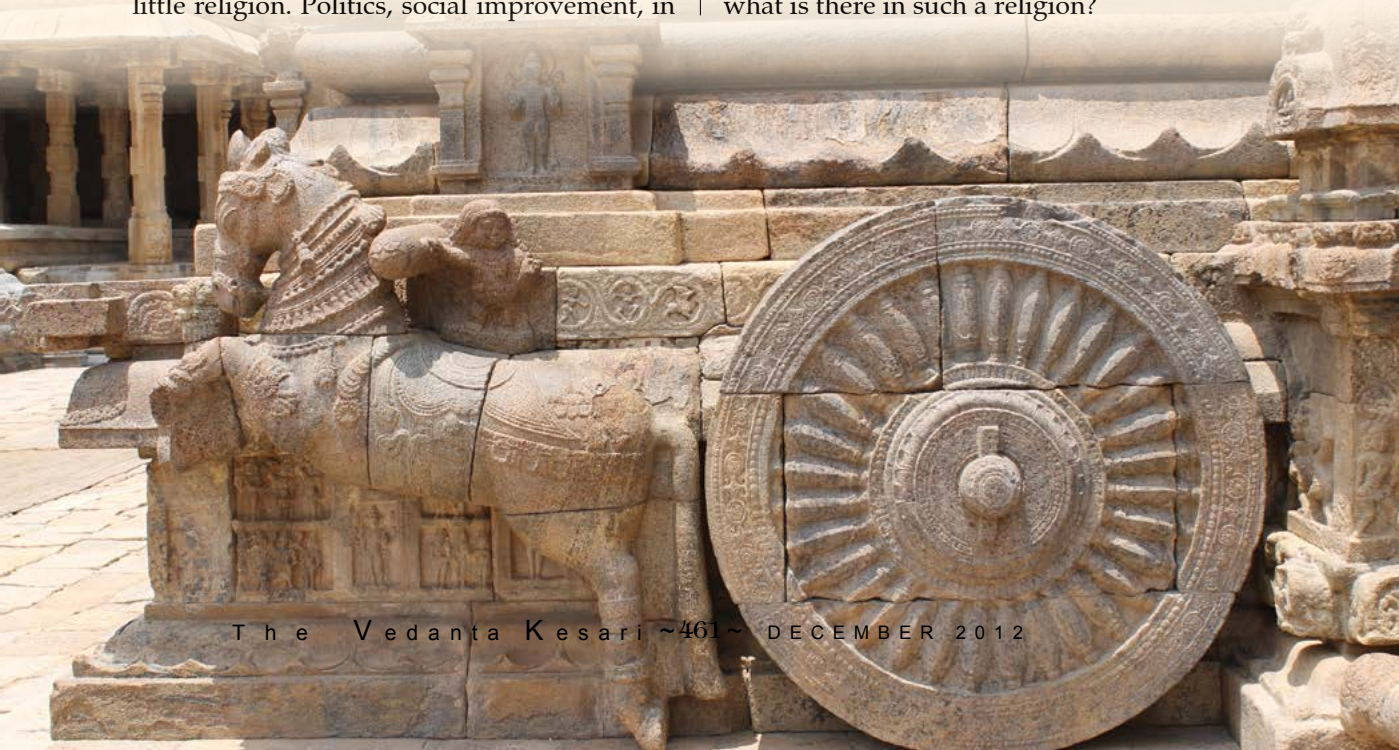
As each nation has one ideal as its vitality, as each nation has one particular groove which is to become its own, so religion is the peculiarity of the growth of the Indian mind. In other parts of the world, religion is one of the many considerations, in fact it is a minor occupation. In England, for instance, religion is part of the national policy. The English Church belongs to the ruling class, and as such, whether they believe in it or not, they all support it, thinking that it is their Church. Every gentleman and every lady is expected to belong to that Church. It is a sign

of gentility. So with other countries, there is a great national power; either it is represented by politics or it is represented by some intellectual pursuits; either it is represented by militarism or by commercialism. There the heart of the nation beats, and religion is one of the many secondary ornamental things which that nation possesses.

Here in India, it is religion that forms the very core of the national heart. It is the backbone, the bed-rock, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built. Politics, power, and even intellect form a secondary consideration here. Religion, therefore, is the one consideration in India.¹⁵

Ay, in other countries religion is only one of the many necessities in life. To use a common illustration which I am in the habit of using, my lady has many things in her parlour, and it is the fashion nowadays to have a Japanese vase, and she must procure it; it does not look well to be without it. So my lady, or my gentleman, has many other occupations in life, and also a little bit of religion must come in to complete it. Consequently he or she has a little religion. Politics, social improvement, in

one word, this world, is the goal of mankind in the West, and God and religion come in quietly as helpers to attain that goal. Their God is, so to speak, the Being who helps to cleanse and to furnish this world for them; this is apparently all the value of God for them. Do you not know how for the last hundred or two hundred years you have been hearing again and again out of the lips of men who ought to have known better, from the mouths of those who pretend at least to know better, that all the arguments they produce against the Indian religion is this—that our religion does not conduce to well-being in this world, that it does not bring gold to us, that it does not make us robbers of nations, that it does not make the strong stand upon the bodies of the weak and feed themselves with the life-blood of the weak. Certainly our religion does not do that. It cannot send cohorts, under whose feet the earth trembles, for the purpose of destruction and pillage and the ruination of races. Therefore they say—what is there in this religion? It does not bring any grist to the grinding mill, any strength to the muscles; what is there in such a religion?



They little dream that that is the very argument with which we prove our religion, because it does not make for this world. Ours is the only true religion because, according to it, this little sense-world of three days' duration is not to be made the end and aim of all, is not to be our great goal. This little earthly horizon of a few feet is not that which bounds the view of our religion. Ours is away beyond, and still beyond; beyond the senses, beyond space, and beyond time, away, away beyond, till nothing of this world is left and the universe itself becomes like a drop in the transcendent ocean of the glory of the soul. Ours is the true religion because it teaches that God alone is true, that this world is false and fleeting, that all your gold is but as dust, that all your power is finite, and that life itself is oftentimes an evil; therefore it is, that ours is the true religion. Ours is the true religion because, above all, it teaches renunciation and stands up with the wisdom of ages to tell and to declare to the nations who are mere children of yesterday in comparison with us Hindus—who own the hoary antiquity of the wisdom, discovered by our ancestors here in India—to tell them in plain words: 'Children, you are slaves of the senses; there is only finiteness in the senses, there is only ruination in the senses; the three short

days of luxury here bring only ruin at last. Give it all up, renounce the love of the senses and of the world; that is the way of religion.' Through renunciation is the way to the goal and not through enjoyment. Therefore ours is the only true religion.¹⁶

. . . India alone was to be, of all lands, the land of toleration and of spirituality; and therefore the fight between tribes and their gods did not long take place here. For one of the greatest sages that was ever born found out here in India even at that distant time, which history cannot reach, and into whose gloom even tradition itself dares not peep—in that distant time the sage arose and declared, 'He who exists is one; the sages call Him variously.' This is one of the most memorable sentences that was ever uttered, one of the grandest truths that was ever discovered. And for us Hindus this truth has been the very backbone of our national existence. For throughout the vistas of the centuries of our national life, this one idea comes down, gaining in volume and in fullness till it has permeated the whole of our national existence, till it has mingled in our blood, and has become one with us. We live that grand truth in every vein, and our country has become the glorious land of religious toleration.

It is here and here alone that they build temples and churches for the religions which have come with the object of condemning our

own religion. This is one very great principle that the world is waiting to learn from us.¹⁷

The reason that we Indians are still living, in spite of so much misery, distress, poverty, and oppression from within and without is that we have a national idea, which is yet necessary for the preservation of the world. The Europeans too have a national idea of their own, without which the world will not go on; therefore they are so strong. Does a man live a moment, if he loses all his strength? A nation is the sum total of so many individual men; will a nation live if it has utterly lost all its strength and activity? Why did not this Hindu race die out, in the face of so many troubles and tumults of a thousand years? If our customs and manners are so very bad, how is it that we have not been effaced from the face of the earth by this time? Have the various foreign conquerors spared any pains to crush us out? Why, then, were not the Hindus blotted out of existence, as happened with men in other countries which are uncivilised? Why has not India depopulated and turned into a wilderness? Why, then foreigners would have lost no time to come and settle in India, and till her fertile lands in the same way as they did and are still doing in America, Australia, and Africa! Well, then, my foreigner, you are not so strong as you think yourself to be; it is a vain imagination.

First understand that India has strength as well, has a substantial reality of her own yet. Furthermore, understand that India is

still living, because she has her own quota yet to give to the general store of the world's civilisation.

Now, that vitality of India has not been touched yet. They have not given up that, and it is still strong—in spite of all their superstitions. Hideous superstitions are there, most revolting some of them. Never mind. The national life-current is still there—the mission of the race.

The Indian nation never will be a powerful conquering people—never. They will never be a great political power; that is not their business, that is not the note India has to play in the great harmony of nations. But what has she to play? God, and God alone. She clings unto that like grim death. Still there is hope there.¹⁸

India Lives On

You said a lot about ancient India. That India still lives, . . . , is not dead, and that living India dares even today to deliver her message without fear or favour of the rich, without fear of any body's opinion, either in the land where her feet are in chains or in the very face of those who hold the end of the chain, her rulers. That India still lives. . . India of undying love, of everlasting faithfulness, the unchangeable, not only in manners and customs, but also in love, in faith, in friendship. And I, the least of that India's children, love you. . . with Indian love, and would any day give up a thousand bodies to help you out of this delusion.¹⁹ □



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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
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| | 3. CW, 7: 356-358 | 7. CW, 2: 445 | 11. CW, 1: 468 | 15. CW, 3: 203-4 |
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The Meaning of Samskriti or Culture

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

Samskriti and Culture

Let us first understand what we mean by the word 'culture.' Since it is being widely used as the equivalent of the Sanskrit term

samskriti, it is better to study this word first, its connotations and implications. The verbal root *kr* (to do) can give rise to several nouns when associated with certain prefixes. Out of these, three words have a direct bearing on our subject: *prakriti* (basic matter or condition), *samskriti* (re-

financed matter or condition) and *vikriti* (modified or decayed matter or condition).

These can be explained further with suitable examples: A block of stone is *prakriti*, the basic raw material. When it is sculptured into a beautiful image, it becomes *samskriti*. Hence, a lump of gold is *prakriti*; an elegant ornament made out of it is *samskriti*. Raw

food articles like rice and sugar are *prakriti*, whereas a delicious pudding prepared out of them is *samskriti*. On the other hand, if the block of stone is broken into chips, or the gold lump reduced to powder, or the food articles get putrefied, they become *vikriti*.

The English word 'culture' is derived from the Latin term *cult* or *cultus*, meaning, 'tilling, care, refinement and worship.' In sum, it means cultivating and refining a thing to such an extent that its end-product evokes our admiration and respect. This is practically the same as *samskriti* of the Sanskrit language.

The word 'cultivation,' also derived from the same Latin root, as generally applied to the cultivation of crops from the earth, involves several processes such as tilling and preparing the ground, sowing the seeds, watering and manuring as also removing the weeds and destroying harmful insects. This will ultimately result in reaping a good crop. This word also fits in very well with the concept of *samskriti*.

Another expression current in the Sanskrit language is *samskara*. It refers to the process of cultivating, preparing or refining (though the word *samskara* also means an impression on the mind which any action one does). The abstract quality in the end product of refinement is called *samskriti*. But very often the two words are used as if they are identical.



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Culture and Human Beings

The culture of a society depends on the culture of the individuals comprising it, as also the relationship they have among themselves. Hence great attention has to be paid to the growing and nurturing of the basic values of culture in an individual.

Contrary to the vociferous assertions of the materialists or the dry philosophers, a human being is the conglomeration of several parts, apparently different from one another, but acting cohesively for a common purpose, that of the jivatman or the individual soul (a conscious entity) inhabiting them. They are: the physical body including the sense-organs, the faculty of speech, the mind and the spirit. A proper training in culture has to tackle each one of these singly, but in a way that it does not interfere or overshadow the natural faculties of the others. For instance, the arms should not be developed to such an extent that they become a burden for the feet to carry them, or allow the nose to develop at the cost of the eyes and the ears! It is a balanced development and a harmonious combination of all the limbs and faculties that conduces not only to the health of the body but also to the well-being of the personality as a whole.

Such a training, as envisaged by a holistic attitude towards the development of the human personality, can be on the following lines:

- ❖ Meticulously observing the rules of health and sanitation. Physical culture including yogasanas.
- ❖ Cultivating the faculty of speech through the study of languages and grammar of those languages.
- ❖ Practising the art of speaking the truth at the right time and place, including the knack of presenting even unpleasant truths in a manner that is gracefully accepted.

❖ Training the mind in developing discretion and discrimination so that the right decision can be taken at the right time within the limitations imposed by the circumstances.

❖ Exercising the intellect by the study of science, philosophy and logic.

❖ Fostering a sense of justice.

❖ Trying to develop a taste or interest in some of the arts such as classical music and dance, good and elevating literature, drawing and painting, drama and other theatrical arts that can rouse our finer sentiments and so on.

❖ Faith in God and a regular prayer.

Culture and Society

Coming to the social aspect of the training for culture, one should start with greater and more intimate association with one's own family members. Though this suggestion may appear a little strange—since such an association seems to be taken for granted—it has become very necessary to bring about a sense of togetherness and cohesion within a family. Such a cohesion is almost absent now-a-days in most of the families, thanks to the industrialization and a mechanical way of life that it has engendered.

The royal secret of good human relationship with others is unselfish love and genuine consideration for the needs and feelings of others. This includes a sense of responsibility and duty towards others.

It goes without saying that this 'charity that begins at home' should gradually be extended to the neighbours, friends and relatives as also other people, leading ultimately to the highest ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ('the whole world is my family', cited in *Panchatantra*).

And it can be assured that a cultured and refined individual will easily succeed in his efforts at being in peace and harmony with the

society for the very reason that he is a cultured and refined individual!

Basis of Culture

In the Upanishads—the canonical texts of Vedanta—we sometimes come across the basic question, ‘What is that by knowing which, everything else is known?’ In a similar vein, we can ask, ‘What is that by possessing which, culture can be possessed automatically?’ The answer as given by our Rishis, our wise ancestors, is ‘spiritual wisdom.’ (And it should be remembered that this spiritual wisdom, in the ultimate analysis, evolves out of spiritual experience and *not* out of book-learning!)

This question may be asked from another angle too: ‘In what way does advancement of culture (or *sanskriti*) lead to spiritual evolution culminating in mature spiritual wisdom?’ A corollary from this question is: ‘What is the basic norm referring to which the evolution of cultural values is estimated?’

The answer is ‘*moksa*’ or emancipation through *atmajnana* or Self-realization. This itself is *adhyatmaavidya* or the science of the Self within. This is the norm for evaluation, nay, the final goal of life itself. And this point of view of our ancient leaders, the Rishis of yore, has stood the test of time!

Training in Culture

The great Rishis have advised us to follow the path of *satya* (truth that brings about the welfare of all) and *dharma* (righteousness) which are eternal values. For this they have given us two parallel paths: *pravritti* (activism) and *nivritti* (restraint). The ultimate goal of life can be reached by starting with the first and passing through the second, they being two phases and faces of life here. It is also possible to have a balanced combination of these two and reach the same (final) goal.

If the elite could learn about these truths by getting training in the gurukulas (forest academies), the masses were educated by the wise elders of the society through such popular devices as *harikathas* (musical discourses with ethico-religious themes), devotional music, folklore, folksongs and folk-dramas, recitation of mythological works and so on. In the modern context, we can make very good use of the various technical devices like the radio, the television and the films to propagate the eternal values taught by our sages, much more effectively, instead of abusing them and degrading the entire society.

That an ideal civilization-cum-culture can throw up an ideal person has been proved by the sage Valmiki in his celebrated work, the *Ramayana*. Apart from Sri Rama, the principal hero, we come across a galaxy of great persons such as Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Vibhishana, Sita, Sumitra and Mandodari, as also the sages like Vasishtha, Agastya and Atri.

Though *adhyatmaavidya*—or, to put it in the modern language, religion and philosophy—has been the primary basis of Indian culture, all other aspects of life here and now, that contribute to the attainment of peace and joy, have also been given their due place. For instance: social values; political institutions including the judiciary; economic ideas; educational system; physical, chemical, biological and health sciences; engineering sciences; arts like music, dance, drama, drawing, painting and sculpture, and so on.

It will be not only interesting and fascinating but also rewarding to undertake a panoramic study of all these facets of Indian culture. Such an attempt can boost our self-confidence and self-image on the one hand and, on the other, further inspire us to do even better, and usher in a new ‘cultured humanity’. □

Swami Vivekananda— the True Ambassador of Indian Culture

SWAMI GAUTAMANANDA

Culture and Civilisation

Man struggles against nature to achieve progress in every field of life. This progress can be of two kinds: the external progress which leads to better standards of physical living is called *civilization*, and internal progress that is achieved by the *refinement* of whole personality viz., body, senses, mind, intellect, emotion, will, morality and spirituality. This internal progress is called culture, a term derived from Latin *cultura*, 'to refine' or 'to cultivate'. A nation requires both, practised in proper proportion, to achieve total development of individuals and of society.

Civilization is skin-deep whereas culture is much deeper than that. Many people mistake civilization for culture. That is why Swami Vivekananda specifically says that it is 'culture' that withstands shocks, not 'civilization'.

Swamiji gave the examples of the nations like Greek, Roman, etc., which had high civilisations, but when the less cultivated and barbaric hoards of Persia, Mongolia, etc.,

invaded and conquered them, they fell for good because their civilization was based on physical strength and power which were easily destroyed by the superior physicality and barbarism of the less cultured races. But India has survived similar attacks because its power lies in its spirituality and culture. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda noted that spiritual culture is the one that makes for lasting progress.

A Culture Based on Vedanta

India's culture is based on Vedanta philosophy. Vedanta believes in the divinity of man, the divine unity of all creation and the various methods called Yogas, to manifest this divinity within. It also advocates the fundamental harmony of all religions. '*Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*', 'Truth is one, sages call it by many names' say the Vedas. This philosophy of Vedanta needs to be placed before the whole of humanity so that humankind could live like a world fraternity. The greatest need of humans at present is mutual love, compassion and



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cooperative action, which alone can ensure lasting peace, well-being and prosperity to all the nations, developed or underdeveloped.¹

Swami Vivekananda's mission was to place before the assembly of world's sincere spiritual aspirants gathered at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 the Universal Gospel of Vedanta. Why Vedanta? It is because Vedanta is highly rational and is the true philosophical basis of all religions. Vedanta says that religion is realisation, a direct experience of God and soul. These have been directly experienced and not merely speculated, through 'intuition' by the sages of Vedanta. And what is intuition?

Intuition, the ability to sense the super-sensuous, is analogous to the intellect but far superior to it in the sense that it transcends the mind and senses, to directly 'experience' the truths of the subtle and spiritual world spoken of in all religions.

Swami Vivekananda was a supreme seer, a Rishi of Vedanta, who could say, 'I have experienced God, I can show Him to you because I know the "method" which can give this experience of the highest and subtlest truth.' This is true significance of Vedanta. It reveals the spiritual truths of the causes of man's birth, sorrow, misery, evil, death and shows also the remedy to go beyond all of them. It destroys forever all sorrows, and brings in everlasting bliss to the aspirant. It aims at 'absolute freedom from all sorrows and attainment of everlasting supreme bliss' (*atyantika dukha nivritti, paramananda avapti*). It would make men and women realise that they are immortal, divine beings and children of God and not the body and mind in which they dwell temporarily and discard at the time of their death.

Swami Vivekananda's Message

To preach this message of divinity of man, to exhort him 'to arise and awake' to his real divine nature and tell him to manifest it as infinite fearlessness, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss in every act of their life was the mission of Swami Vivekananda's life. He himself often said, 'Man making is the mission of my life'.

Swami Vivekananda pointed out that the basic teaching of Vedanta and of every religion was to make their followers feel that they are divine and immortal. This central message of Vedanta has been the core of Indian tradition from the days of Rigveda for several millennia. This has made them proclaim that one should renounce the selfish desire for everything of this tinsel world to realise this truth of 'the Self of man'. As a means, one should serve all the children of God with love, compassion and sympathy. Thus, renunciation and service have been the supreme ideals of Vedanta.

The Rishis of Vedanta saw that the quest of the innate divinity is the real religion. Hence, all religions in their basic teaching, stressed on renunciation and service.

For example, Jesus said, 'Let the dead bury the dead, follow thou me'. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon (money) at the same time'. 'It is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the gates of heaven', etc. All burning words of renunciation!

Swami Vivekananda found out that to live and preach this message of the divinity of man and how to manifest it in every action of his life was his mission, viz., 'mission of India' to the world. He considered himself as just one from the Indian missionaries who will flood the West not before long. He pointed out this fact through spiritual history of the world. Whenever the nations of the world were brought together as under Buddhist, Roman,

or British empires, the spiritual message of Vedanta flowed to other nations bringing moral and cultural excellence to them.

The Ambassador of Indian Culture

The end of 19th century, 1893, was such a propitious time when Swami Vivekananda, the greatest modern ambassador of Vedanta, appeared on the world scene at the World Parliament of Religions which started on 11 September 1893 at Chicago.

He was the 'condensed India', as a writer put it, and hence the best modern ambassador of Indian Culture.

Swamiji spoke about the necessity of reason in religion also, which he argued would save humanity from sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism. Real religion to him was 'realisation', not dogmas or doctrines. Religion has a methodology to experiment, realise and verify the facts of God, soul and other laws of spiritual world. All religions were so many paths as the experience of a Rishi, expressed in Rigveda declared, 'Truth is one, sages call it by many names' (*ekam sat, vipraah bahuda vadanti*). Thus, he preached 'harmony of all world religions' as a dire necessity of the modern world, a fact the September 11, 2001, has testified! The spiritual twin goal of 'realisation of one's own Self and helping others to attain a similar goal' (*atmano mokshartham jagat hita ya cha*) was the real goal of human life. It was a Universal Religion that he preached.

Such a goal at the individual's level would make every being selfless, pure, holy and divine, thus paving the way for manifesting love, compassion, sacrifice and service. Having such noble individuals, the world peace and prosperity, which is ever eluding the grasp of world leaders since a century, viz. 1st World War of 1914-18, can become a reality.

He also declared the nature of such a Universal Religion as: 'It would appeal to head and heart. It would appeal to reason, science, religion and spirituality. It would stop exclusive competition or "conversion" and would usher in a universal brotherhood among all religions. The Universal Religion has a holistic attitude towards all religions, seeking spiritual unity amidst their diversity in externals of food, raiment, ritual etc. It would be equally kind to the followers of Krishna and to those of Christ. Give such a religion. Everyone will accept'.

That his message is true is being proved by the current happenings in the Western societies. Recently there was a news item from USA that 80% of American Christians believe that 'other' religions also are true (though it raised a hue and cry!). An American writer informs that more and more of American universities are teaching Vedanta. Vedanta books are registering increased sales in American bookstalls. Americans feel that a loving sect of Islam, viz. Sufi, would be good for American Muslims to follow in place of the pro-Jehadi variety of Islam which was the cause of September 11 tragedy. Sufism emerged due to influence of Vedanta on Islam.

What Vedanta Offers

Let me narrate a personal experience in this context. I was requested to speak on 'Harmony of Religions' in an American (Unitarian Congregational) Church at Columbus, which was attended by large number of white audience. In fact, the head of the Church who attended the lecture was so pleased that he used the ideas in his next Sunday lecture in the Church! The Vedanta Societies of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement are multiplying slowly, but steadily, all over USA and also in European and other countries.

One American writer, Mathew S. Pugh, writes thus under the caption 'What does Vedanta Offer America?' 'Americans need a scientific religion which values individuals, equality, generosity, compassion, self-effort, optimism, scholarship, beauty, universalism and especially practicality. Vedanta supplies all these.' He quotes also in his support the American Vedantist, Ralph Waldo Emerson saying, 'Vedanta offers America whatever America really needs'.²

Swami Vivekananda's plea that helping the poor was equal to worshipping God has attracted international attention. As an example, I saw in Mauritius some years back that a 10,000 seat auditorium had been named 'Swami Vivekananda Hall for International Cultural Conferences'. To my wonder, I saw at the entrance of it a bust of Swami Vivekananda with a plaque below it reading, 'To serve the poor and needy without any distinction of nation, race or religion can be a universal religion!'

Bill Gates, during his recent visit to India, is reported to have taken a book of Swami Vivekananda, *Karma Yoga*, which teaches that those who are rich should help others in need selflessly! The effect of this book was unimaginable. The IT tycoon is reported to have parted with almost half his huge wealth to help educational and social causes after studying this book! We may recall how Swamiji influenced John Rockefeller to donate his huge wealth for public good.

Conclusion

Let us in the end quote excerpts from the two Westerners, Dr. Annie Besant, the Theosophist, and the orientalist, Prof.

A.L.Basham, which speak how great an ambassador of Indian Culture Swami Vivekananda was.

A Theosophist representative from India to the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893, Dr. Annie Besant, wrote about Swami Vivekananda thus:

India was not be shamed before the hurrying arrogant West by this her Envoy and her son. He brought her message, spoke in her name and the herald remembered the dignity of the royal land whence he came. . . . One of the audience who came out of the hall (after hearing Vivekananda) said: 'That man a heathen! And we send missionaries to his people! It would be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us!'³

Again, A.L. Basham, wrote:

Vivekananda restored in educated Hindus faith . . . He taught that all the institutions and practices of Hinduism were essentially good . . . He declared that Hinduism was the oldest and purest of the world's religions and India was the *most spiritual nation* of the world. All that was best in the religion of ancient world had come from India. . . From the 1st visit of Vivekananda to America, neo-Hinduism has been slowly making converts outside India (well-known literary men in USA like Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood had become Vedantists) . . . In centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main *moulders* of the modern world.

I believe also that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world's history because he virtually initiated what Dr.C.E.M. Joad once called the 'Counter attack from the East.'⁴

Thus we see Swami Vivekananda being recognized as *the* modern ambassador of Indian culture by the best of the intellectuals, what to speak of ordinary men! □

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The Need for Culture

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

The vast majority of mankind are not really fit to take up the religious life seriously. They are still far, far off from the requisite condition of mind. They have too much body-consciousness and are obsessed and bound by finite things. Even a far distant glimpse of the Infinite cannot yet be for them. They want the pleasures of the body, power, earthly riches, sexual enjoyment and long life; and they are afraid of renunciation and death. Thus most men live and die, completely earth-bound, without any conscious effort to break through its limitations. For them religion can only be formal. If they were left alone on a solitary island, and given the means for worldly occupations, they would not trouble about religion. But since they have to live in human society where religion exists as a universal institution and where they learn certain habits of thought and actions, apparently religious, they appear to be interested in religion. But they have no real idea of it.

This, however, is not a complete picture of even the worldly man. There is another and brighter side of the picture. This other side depicts the hope and the unfolding glory of man. Man does not live for himself alone. Even the most ordinary man of the world cannot remain satisfied with loving himself alone. He also loves others, even though they may only be his own relations. He has moral consciousness. He seeks more and more knowledge: he has caught the lure of truth. He has the

sense of beauty. It is true this latter aspect is dormant in the life of most men, but it exists nevertheless.

It is this that leads man upwards to the realization of truth and the fulfilment of life. Moral sense, aesthetic sense, love, hunger for knowledge and truth, activity—these are the saving and ennobling elements in a man's life. Out of them springs religion. In the complete elimination of the former aspect and the full and complete development of the latter, lies the culmination of religion.

In the primary stages when the animal is strong in man, religion for him can only be submission to sacred beliefs and observance of forms and ceremonies. Religion is not real and vital to him. Nevertheless the sincere observance of the forms and adherence to the beliefs are essentially necessary for him and play an important part in the evolution of his spiritual consciousness. To most persons religion appeals for its occasions of festivity and aesthetic enjoyment. Hence in all countries we have temples, images, mythologies, gorgeous ceremonials and festivals connected with religion. The fact is, man has to transcend the grossness of matter and train his mind to dwell on finer realities before he can ever hope to be religious.

Art, morality, search for knowledge, intense activity and charity and love help immensely in training the mind to feel and perceive finely.

□ Excerpts from *Spiritual Practice*, by Swami Ashokananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Pp.11-21

What is art? It is the presentation of matter and objects of the senses clothed in the light of the supernatural. We all know why we take food, wear clothes or live in a house. Yet we are always trying to forget the ostensible purpose of these actions. For their immediate objects are gross, however necessary they may be to life; and we want to forget the material aspects of our life. So we clothe them with art.

We try to drown the material side of eating, dressing or dwelling in the consciousness of superfine beauty. Mere nourishing food is not enough for us. The food must be delectable, having fine form, colour, smell, and taste. It must be served in an artistic fashion, on choice plates and dishes. The eating place must be beautiful, and we must hold interesting conversation as if it were the important part and eating only secondary. Our clothes must not only be sufficient to protect us against the ravages of weather, but they must be beautiful. To the mind, beauty is more important in a cloth than its wearing qualities. It is the same with our dwellings. In this way, we learn to transcend the gross and perceive

the finer realities, and the mind learns to feel a profound dissatisfaction for the material life and to yearn for higher realities.

But art by itself is not enough for the elevation of the mind of the ordinary man. It may debilitate it also; for beauty is elusive and we may often mistake the phantom for the reality. Hence there must also be moral struggle. Nothing but a strong moral consciousness and aspiration after high ideals, not merely a profession thereof, can give wings to our perceptions of beauty and make them soar into the serene heights of spirituality. Devoid of moral consciousness, art often wallows in the mire of earthliness. Morality gives us strength. It teaches us to stand on and live by impersonal principles. Through morality also we overcome the gross and rise to the planes of the fine.

Morality gives a correct tone to all our motives and actions, our labours in and our relations to the world.

Love equally releases us from the limitations of the gross. Love and service kill the little self and rend asunder the bonds that hold us to the world of matter, to our body.

Similarly knowledge and activity. Knowledge reveals wonders within the apparently commonplace, and leads us on from the visible and apparent to the world lying beyond our present conception. And intense activity satisfies and eventually destroys our worldly instincts, and gives us the taste of a higher, finer life. The little things of the world, the little acquisitions, and exultations over little triumphs no longer satisfy us. We want spaciousness and bigger things.

All these forces are working slowly but steadily for the uplift and liberation of man. They are impelling him towards real religion. Without them the intermediate stages between the ordinary man and the religious man cannot be covered. The essential condition of spirituality is the annihilation of the lower self and the desire for earthly things. A mind scattered over a million objects of desire cannot reach out towards God. It must unite and propel its scattered rays in one single direction; then only will it reveal the face of God. But such renunciation of desire is at first impossible for it. It is too gross; it is almost hopelessly enmeshed in desire; it cannot perceive the finer realities. Art, morality, love, service, knowledge, and activity alone can help the mind out of its present worldliness.

But without adherence to a religion and submission to its fundamentals, none of these can be properly effective. In fact, unless we believe in some eternal, ultimate reality, and in the solidarity of life and the universe, art, morality, social service, or knowledge cannot properly flourish. We are not speaking here of those exceptional persons who instinctively achieve the highest without any conscious admission of religious truths. But most men cannot properly understand or benefit by art, morality, or charity, unless they relate

them to the principle of Divinity. That is why in all ages we find art, morality, and service existing as aspects of religion, connected to its principles and institutions.

So for the benefit of the vast majority of mankind, in order that they may eventually be fit to live religion truly and seriously, it is necessary, absolutely necessary, that our corporate life should be made more and more aesthetic, more morally exalted, more full of charity, love, and service, of eagerness for knowledge and truth, and intense activity. In fact, if men were to be tremendously active, mindful at the same time of art, morality, and service, they would do much greater good to themselves than if they were to mumble prayers, visit temples, and play at religion as the majority do at present. Unfortunately, however, true moral or aesthetic development, or passion for service, is not possible for them without conscious relation to religious beliefs and institutions. Hence for practical purposes, formal religion, with its dogmas, myths, and rituals, must always be; but morality, art, service, industry, and knowledge must be developed to their fullest extent, for in these lies the real salvation of most men.

In Hindu phraseology, Tamas (inertia) must be overcome by Rajas (activity); Rajas should be conquered by Sattva (tranquil joy). But Sattva can only grow gradually. Sattva, serenity of mind, wherein alone Truth and Reality can be properly reflected, is not born suddenly. There are gradations, as represented by the mental effects of art, morality, knowledge, love, service, etc.

But why do we insist on art, morality, etc., if religion itself can spiritualize the gross and the material? The question is a pertinent one. When religion becomes institutional, it is affirmed by people as a matter of course. Thus Hindus believe in their religion and accept the

truth of its teachings. There are also rules and customs pertaining to it, which, though they differ with different sections of people and in different places, are yet more or less observed as sacred. Even where seriousness about religion is lacking, there is often an acceptance of beliefs and an observation of rules. Thus before eating, most Hindus offer the food mentally to God. In all affairs of life, such association of the Divine Idea with mundane things has become an established rule. Hinduism teaches its votaries to spiritualize life in all its activities and human relations. This direct relation of earthly things to God through spiritualization, without the aid of art etc., no doubt serves to train the mind to feel and perceive finer realities.

So long as people believe in religion, no doubt religion itself will be very beneficial in teaching them fineness of perception. But as religion is not taken seriously by the majority of people, more tangible means, more appealing intermediaries, must be found for them and associated with religion. Morality is more real and tangible to most people than the spiritual verities; knowledge is more effective; service is more fruitful.

We should, therefore, lay the utmost emphasis on them in the case of the average man. Spiritualization of the concerns of life is all right. But most men can only slowly progress along that path without substantial aid from morality, art, knowledge, action and service. □

The Indian Civilization—An Observation

The civilizations which were interested in the sciences include eight groups: the Indians, the Persians, the Chaldeens, the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians and the Arabs. . . The first nation (which cultivated the sciences) is that of the Indians. The nation itself is extremely important, diverse, and is made of powerful kingdoms. It is known for its wisdom; and all people and all generations gone by testify that it was distinguished in all the branches of knowledge. . . . The Indian civilization, among all nations, through the centuries and since antiquity, was the source of wisdom, justice and moderation. They were people of stabilizing virtues, creators of sublime thought, universal fables, rare inventions and remarkable flashes of wit.

—**Sa'id al-Andalusi**, Arab astronomer and historian of science, 11th century A.D.



Is Indian Culture Spiritual?

SWAMI DAYATMANANDA

The Immortal India

Indian culture was, is, and will be spiritual for all eternity. Spirituality is the other side of Indian Culture. And India is destined to maintain and preserve spirituality. Referring to India's role, says Swami Vivekananda¹:

Just as you [the westerners] are brave to jump at the mouth of a cannon with a hurrah, just as you are brave in the name of patriotism to stand up and give up your lives for your country, so are they [Indians] brave in the name of God. There it is that when a man declares that this is a world of ideas, that it is all a dream, he casts off clothes and property to demonstrate that what he believes and thinks is true. There it is that a man sits on the banks of a river, when he has known that life is eternal, and wants to give up his body just as nothing, just as you can give up a bit of straw. Therein lies their heroism, that they are ready to face death as a brother, because they are convinced that there is no death for them. Therein lies the strength that has made them invincible through hundreds of years of oppression and foreign invasion, and tyranny.

The nation lives today, and in that nation even in the days of the direst disaster, spiritual giants have never failed to arise.'

Vedic civilization is one of the older civilizations, if not the oldest. This great civilization flourished on the banks of the river Saraswati, some 11000 years ago. It is still a living, vital civilization.

Indian culture is the child of this great Vedic civilization.

The Beginning of the Quest

At the very dawn of life there arose the quest for solving the mystery of life and death.

We find a Rishi enquiring: 'What is That, knowing which all else is known. What is the real source of happiness? What is the goal of life?' With these questions began a new epoch in the history of Indian culture.

'But,' some people may object, 'does man need answers to these questions? Is there any harm if man does not solve these mysteries? Can one not carry on life?'

The answer is, 'No, man cannot live without knowing what is worth knowing.

□ Swami Dayatmananda is the Head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Buckinghamshire, UK.

Sooner or later one has to face these mysteries of life.' If man does not know the Truth then *mahati vinastih*, 'there is really a great loss' as the Kena Upanishad says.

Thus went on our great Rishis. They were great researchers, as it were, in the nature of life and reality. They said that if man 'knows' the essence of life, the Atman, then he truly attained the goal of human life. If he does not know the Atman, then his life has been in vain. Hence arose a deep prayer from the very bottom of the Rishi's heart:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real.
Lead me from darkness to Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality.

The merciful Lord answered the prayers. These ancient Rishies came face to face with the core of their being, the Atman, and solved the mystery of life and death, and became immortal. On this sacred river of Saraswati rose the voice of the Rishi:

Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion. Knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.

This was the same voice, the voice of the greatest of the Rishis of our times, Swami Vivekananda, which echoed the same Truth at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

The Eternal Voice of Rishis

The Indian Rishis discovered long ago that the whole universe has come out of the One Reality or Divinity. It is the firm belief of every Hindu that each individual is a manifestation of Divinity. Since man is divine in essence, it goes without saying that the realization of this divinity hidden within is the only aim of life. They called this essence of man as God. By realizing God alone, who is blessedness and joy, man goes beyond all fear.

Hence Self-knowledge, or God-realization, is the goal of life.

The foundation of Indian culture lies in this spiritual discovery of the Rishis. This spiritual ideal has inspired countless saints and sages from time immemorial and continues to do so for all times.

From the most ancient period, destiny has entrusted India with the task of upholding this spiritual culture. A galaxy of great men and women down the long history of Indian culture stood firm for the fulfilment of these highest aspirations. There is not a single period of India's national life when India was lacking in spiritual giants, capable of moving the world. It is India's pride that in almost every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of her recorded history, she has produced these holy men who personify India's spirituality in their lives and teachings.

In recent times, Swami Vivekananda summarised this sacred spiritual ideal of India thus²:

Each soul is potentially Divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion.

Since man has come from God, it is his destiny is to go back to Him. This going back to God is called evolution. Thus life is a journey from the many to the One; life is an opportunity to advance towards this goal of God-realization.

The Scheme of Life

According to Indian spiritual tradition, the journey to God has four stages. First man is taught the truth about himself and the world or *samsara* (i.e., he is asked to follow

dharma). Then he is helped through rituals, etc. (performance of *yajnas* or external rituals) to attain purity of the mind and gradually gain control over the body and mind. Thereafter he is taught how to direct and concentrate (*upasanas*) his mind on the higher truths. Finally, he is given the highest truth (the *mahavakyas*, 'the four great statements' such as 'I am Brahman'). He meditates upon it and this leads to moksha or liberation.

Every human being desires to achieve the four supreme values in life. These are Dharma (righteousness), Artha (money), Kama (legitimate enjoyments) and Moksha (spiritual liberation). This scheme of life is applicable to all. It was designed for the well-being of all and its implications were far reaching. The purpose of these values of life is to gradually lead man from the world of Maya to God. Maya is nothing but lust and greed (*kama* and *kanchana*). Maya consists of desiring wealth and enjoyment and forgetting moral and spiritual aspects of life. But if man excludes Dharma and Moksha from the scheme of values, he remains bound in the network of Samsara or worldly existence.

Again, to facilitate the attainment of these values, life is divided into four stages or ashramas. These are: life of a student (*brahmacharya*), life as a householder (*grihstha*), life as a recluse (*vanaprastha*), and life as an ascetic (*sannyasa*). These four stages of life are meant for leading man through a progressive scale of Self-realization.

In the first stage (*brahmacharya*), the student sits at the feet of a teacher and learns all about Dharma and how to put it into practice.

In the second stage (*garhasthya*), man puts into practice what he learned from his Guru at the Gurukula. If he lived according to the directions of the scriptures and the Guru,

he would have acquired purity of mind and sufficient mind-control.

In the third stage (*vanaprastha*), of life, he slowly withdraws from an active external life and practises *Upasanas* or contemplation.

When he progresses sufficiently he takes to a life of renunciation (*sannyasa*) and strives to attain moksha or liberation.

Again since all men are not born equal the Vedic tradition divides men into four classes solely depending on their qualities and actions (*guna* and *karma*). This division is based to help man travel from a lower stage to a higher stage. (Later on this division turned into the birth-based present day caste system leading to many an evil.) Indian tradition proposes four Yogas of Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Jnana to complete our spiritual journey. These Yogas are based upon the particular faculty that is dominant in man. These Yogas helps man unfold his potential divinity and realize his true nature and attain liberation.

Avatara or Incarnations of God

India is the birth-place of many Incarnations of God. Who can count how many times He descended in this sacred land to establish the Eternal Religion, the Santana Dharma, for the good of the whole world!

It is true that more often than not, men forget the purpose of life. They turn into veritable *asuras* or demons, leading a life of unbridled passions bringing untold suffering both to themselves and others. Whenever such a situation develops, the Divine Lord incarnates Himself. Says Sri Krishna in the Gita (4.7), 'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come down to help mankind.'

The latest example of this assurance of Lord is the appearance Sri Ramakrishna whose life and teachings have reiterated the essential goal of life which Sanatana Dharma

laid down before us. Sri Ramakrishna was the living embodiment of this Eternal Religion. Echoing the ancient Indian tradition Sri Ramakrishna declared: 'The goal of human life is to love God. He is born in vain, who, having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life.' Referring to this, Swami Vivekananda pointed out, 'Therefore my Master's message to mankind is: "Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself."' "

Sri Ramakrishna declared:

The Santana Dharma, the Eternal Religion declared by the Rishis, will alone endure. The various creeds you hear of nowadays have come into existence through the will of God and will disappear again through His will. They will not last forever.

Sanatana Dharma alone endures

There are four 'Gs' of Indian culture—Gita, Gaya, Ganga, and Gayatri. They unify Indian spiritual culture. So long as these are honoured the spiritual culture of India will last.

But sometimes, seeing the rising materialism everywhere, one asks, 'Will the spiritual culture of India die?' The answer is an emphatic, 'No!' As Swami Vivekananda says:

Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all

moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice.³

Such a thing can never be. . . The Indian nation cannot be killed. Deathless it stands, and it will stand so long as that spirit shall remain at the background, so long as her people do not give up their spirituality.⁴

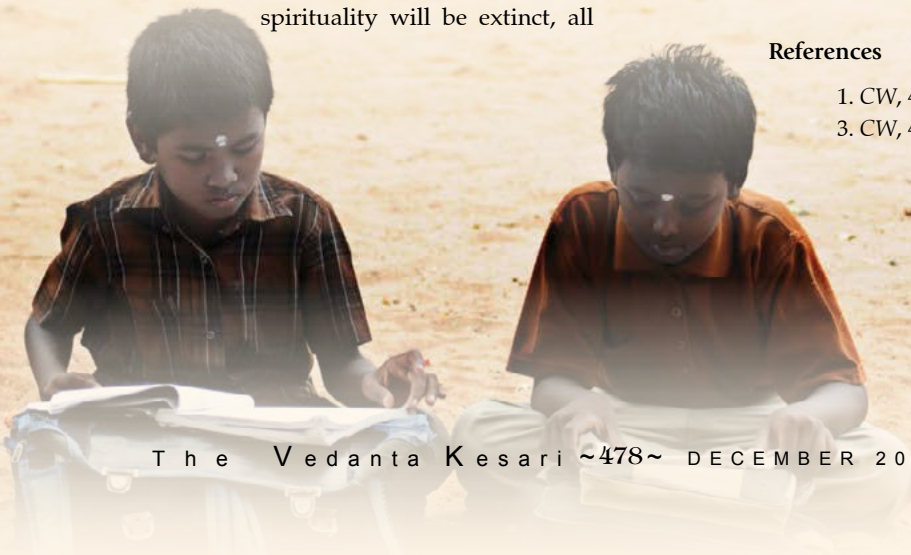
Conclusion

Indian culture is predominantly spiritual. This, however, does not mean all Indians are spiritual. Far from it. As Lord Krishna stated only one among thousands strives for spiritual life. Most men are secular. Few, in truth, seek a spiritual life. What is meant is that India remains a land of spirituality. It continues to produce spiritual giants time after time in order to perpetuate the spiritual ideal in the world. No amount of secularisation is going to destroy or side-track her spiritual ideal. For saints, sages and Incarnations of God keep on appearing at all times to keep India's spiritual culture current for the good of the world.

This is the destiny which God Himself has ordained for India. □

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Sri Ramakrishna— the Embodiment of India's Eternal Culture

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

An Eternal Fountainhead

In his famous essay titled 'Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna', Swami Vivekananda writes:

Truth is of two kinds: (1) that which is cognisable by the five ordinary senses of man, and by reasonings based thereon; (2) that which is cognisable by the subtle, supersensuous power of Yoga.

Knowledge acquired by the first means is called science; and knowledge acquired by the second is called the Vedas. . .

The person in whom this supersensuous power is manifested is called a Rishi, and the supersensuous truths which he realises by this power are called the Vedas.

This Rishihood, this power of supersensuous perception of the Vedas, is real religion. And so long as this does not develop in the life of an initiate, so long is religion a mere empty word to him, and it is to be understood that he has not taken yet the first step in religion.¹

India's rich and profound spiritual tradition that forms the backbone of India's Eternal Culture is an authentic record of the realizations of rishis constantly engaged in Consciousness research. The truths that they actually 'saw', not through the eyes or the senses but through supersensuous

perception, form a dynamic and vibrant body of knowledge created through their exploration and insight into the mystery of Consciousness. This river of rich spiritual tradition carrying India's Eternal Culture is flowing unhindered in a thousand streams over the millennia through a perennial chain of teacher-disciple succession, *guru-shishya parampara*, coming down to the present age of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

Romain Rolland spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as being the consummation of the spiritual life lived millennia upon millennia by millions of people in India who devoted their lives for the cultivation of spiritual knowledge. This profound spiritual culture

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is as *eternal* and as imperishable as the God or Atman/Brahman that this spiritual culture teaches and embodies. The Sanskrit words describing the ‘eternality’ of the Atman are so wonderfully expressive: *nitya*, *shashwata*, *purana* (Gita, 2.20). Of these, the word *purana* is particularly significant. Adi Shankaracharya, commenting on this word in his Gita Bhashya (commentary on the Gita), explains it as *pura api nava*, although ancient, it is yet ever new! It is this ancient freshness, the lasting newness of India’s eternal culture that Sri Ramakrishna embodies in his inimitable way.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Spontaneity

Eternality has two important characteristics: spontaneity and naturalness. When we look at the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky day after day do we ever feel even remotely that after all it is the same sun or the same moon or the same stars that we have seen yesterday or have been seeing day after day! It is so spontaneously fresh. It is so naturally new! That is the very characteristic of *purana*.

Sri Ramakrishna’s spontaneity and naturalness of spirituality is what strikes one most when one tries to contemplate his unique life. Spontaneity and naturalness again translate in practical terms as ‘un-self-consciousness’. This is one hallmark of all the galaxy of spiritual souls in the Ramakrishna spiritual tradition, be it Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda or Swami Brahmananda. About Swami Vivekananda, his American disciple who chose to call herself a ‘friend’ rather than a disciple, said:

That utter lack of self-consciousness, of self-importance, was perhaps one of his outstanding characteristics. Indeed, Swamiji, as he himself had once said of his Master, was not ‘holy’, he had become identified with holiness.²



About his own Master, Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji once remarked to Sister Nivedita,

What is the place of Ramakrishna in this scheme? He is the method, that wonderful unconscious method! He did not understand himself. . . . But he lived that great life—and I read the meaning.³

The utter lack of self-consciousness is spoken of in the Indian spiritual culture and tradition as one of the most important characteristics of *paramahansas*, men soaked in the Supreme Spiritual Consciousness all the time, living and moving and having their being in the Divine. This is true of a Krishna, of a Jesus, of a Buddha, or a Ramakrishna, Sarada, Vivekananda, Brahmananda and so on.

We are wont to regard spirituality as a dead serious business, devoid of fun and mirth. But the eternal treasure house of Indian spiritual culture cherishes countless pictures

of humanity's greatest spiritual personalities immersed in childlike fun, full of innocent mirth, bathing in unceasing springs of joy. Sri Ramakrishna is one of the most remarkable among such fun-loving Avatars, the latest and the most easily accessible to the modern mind! Wherever he is, the entire atmosphere is charged as much with spirituality and Godliness as innocent fun and mirth. *Anander hat* ('mart of joy') is how this phenomenon has been described by his Boswell, the recorder of his *Gospel*, Sri Mahendranath Gupta who styled himself as M.

Bliss Aspect of Brahman that Sri Ramakrishna Embodies

Upanishads, the eternal treasures of India's spiritual culture and wisdom, have two wonderful definitions of Brahman, the Supreme Reality:

Satyam, jnanam, anantam Brahma

Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinite ⁴

and

Vijnanam anandam Brahma

Brahman is Consciousness, Joy ⁵

The most well-known description of Brahman is, however, *sat-chit-ananda swarupa* or in a different language, *asti-bhati-priyam*. That is, Brahman is the veritable embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. It is the Bliss component of Brahman, the aspect of Pure, Absolute Joy, that Sri Ramakrishna embodied in his life, perhaps because it is the most needed aspect in this anxiety-ridden, conflict-torn, strife-stricken joyless world of science and technology wherein it is the panic-wrecked giant intellect that is dancing on the stage rather than a joyful heart full of love and peace.

Brahman has also been described as *shantam, shivam*—peaceful, auspicious. Sri

Ramakrishna's life, his form, his message, his very looks, are the embodiment of these two aspects of Brahman—peace and auspiciousness. India's eternal spiritual culture stipulates that bliss or joy is a necessary precondition to peace. In fact, the Bhagavadgita (2.66) asks: 'How can there be happiness for a person who has no peace?'

Sri Ramakrishna and the spiritual tradition that he has set in motion for the good of the world through his chief most and dearest apostle Swami Vivekananda, embody these two all-important components of India's eternal culture in this modern age of science and technology, namely, peace and joy, both being subsumed into what Swami Vivekananda emphasized as *prem, prem ei matra dhan*—'love, selfless love, that is the one and only treasure'. The world is thirsty and hungry for this priceless treasure, this pure wealth of the spirit handed down to the world through millennia upon millennia of spiritual tradition and culture by countless saints and sages, Avatars and Divine Manifestations. Sri Ramakrishna has been described by Swami Vivekananda as 'L-O-V-E Personified'—*prema-ghana-murti*, 'the condensed form of pure Love'.

In this famous hymn of vesper service, Aratrika hymn, to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda goes into ecstasy as it were describing this *prema* aspect of his Master: *bhaswara-bhava-sagara-chira-unmada-prema-pathar!* Which translates roughly into:

You are the ocean of pure selfless Love, effulgent, luminous sea of divine spiritual emotions, always intoxicated and mad with Divine Love.

It is this gentle power of pure love that imperceptibly overwhelms the hearts of sincere seekers and elevates their hearts to realms ineffable.

The Gentle Power That Was Sri Ramakrishna

How quietly a Ramakrishna invades one's personality is a matter of experience and perception for any sincere spiritual aspirant. This illiterate priest of Bhavatarini Kali at Dakshineswar, clad for most part of the day merely in the apparel of bhakti (*projjala-bhakti-pataavrita*) rather than earthly clothes; with the almost contagious innocence of a five-year-old but ripe nevertheless with an ageless wisdom; with a disarming Krishna-like smile playing on his lips, his countenance beaming with the bliss of God-absorption (*samadhi*) and his ecstatic movements radiating the soothing splendour of a million moons; with a sweet stammer that is the very antithesis of shrill oratory, but with divine discourses pouring spontaneously from the very recesses of his being as in a torrential outpour of ambrosial waterfall; with an unparalleled compassion for the human being in bondage—how could one even conceive that this humble child of Kali was such a storehouse of spiritual power that devastated even a Vivekananda so proud of his mental strength and intellectual accomplishments! Swami Shivananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's intimate disciples, once observed,

We knew and thought of him as a very holy man, pure and innocent like a child. But how could we ever know that this little man contained within him millions of universes!

To say the least, all this would naturally sound funny to most people. It would appear to be rhetoric and verbal jugglery at best, or downright oriental hyperbole (unsubstantiated, unverified and unverifiable panegyric) at worst. That is how it sometimes appeared to Sri Ramakrishna's own disciples—from the highly intellectual, agnostic Naren, who alone knew the Master most intimately,

to the unsophisticated, illiterate Latu, who felt a spontaneous attraction for the Master but knew not why. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna himself did not care to understand much of himself. His uniqueness in the realm of spiritual tradition was: he was just content with getting more and more absorbed in Truth in Its multifarious manifestations, from the apparently lowest so-called idolatry to the highest flights of Advaitic awareness of Oneness.

Speaking about himself, he said that he was a glutton in the spiritual realm, the insatiable hunger of his soul driving him to savour the spiritual essence in ever so many ways. He was an adventurous mountaineer of the Spirit who tirelessly set out to scale newer and higher peaks of spiritual sublimity in a mad pursuit of an irrepressible inner urge. He was an expert diver into the ocean of the inner Spirit who joyously delved into the depths of that ocean of both the formless Reality as well as that with form, and brought out the gems of spiritual wisdom to be shared with the entire humankind in a rapturous rapport of universal kinship.

Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna was intensely human, simple and unsophisticated, freely accessible to all without distinction and so overwhelmingly compassionate. We could feel free to talk to him—yes, to him who is now dead and gone for more than a hundred years, in gross physical terms, but very palpably alive in his subtle spiritual Ramakrishna form, a fact vouchsafed by his disciples. We could feel the vibrations of his assuring response in the depths of our hearts.

When our minds become boggled and we stand dumbfounded by the sheer profundity of his amazing spiritual sadhanas followed by the unending procession of his breathtaking realizations, his trances and ecstasies and

samadhis and rapturous sports in the spiritual field; when we tend to feel ashamed of our own littleness, impurities of heart, lack of spiritual fervour—it is then that his voice of compassion speaks to us, as it did to Arjuna:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever contemplates my form and my teachings shall inherit my wealth, even as a son does inherit his father's wealth. All that ye need to do therefore is to strive to get absorbed in such a contemplation; as to the rest, I shall take care of everything.

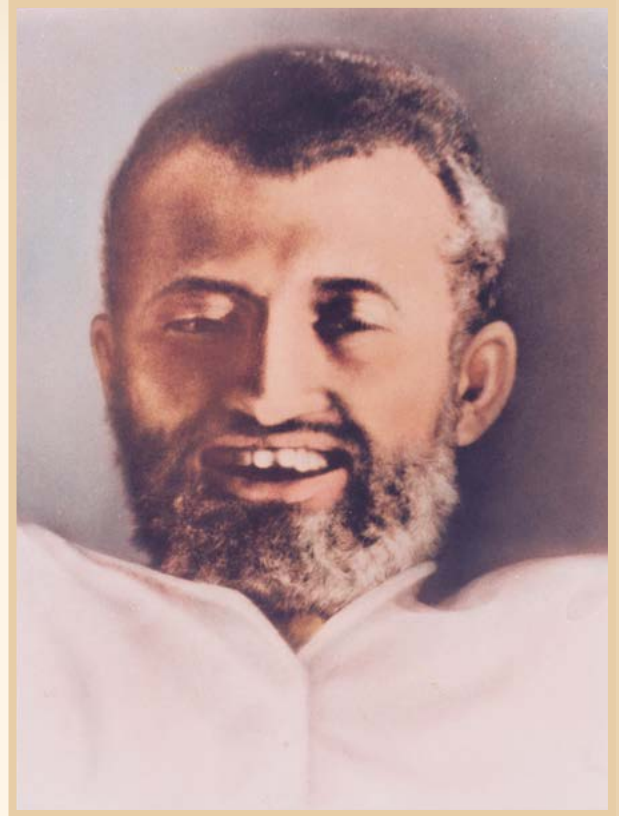
Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly gave this assurance to M, Sri Mahendranath Gupta, the recorder of the *Gospel*.

M mentioned it to his intimate circle of devotees and disciples, and one among the latter, Swami Nityatmananda, records this Great Assurance, this Divine Command, this Singular Promise of the Lord in his immortal books of M's conversations. M himself seems to have couched this Great Assurance in biblical language and style to add grandeur and gravity. M then adds, very significantly and touchingly: 'And what does his wealth consist of? *Jnana-bhakti, viveka-vairagya, shanti-sukha, prema-samadhi* (Knowledge and devotion; discrimination and dispassion; peace and bliss; divine love and God-absorption).' What a promise and how very assuring for us present-day humans caught in the rat race of what Sri Ramakrishna used to call *kama-kanchana* (lust and gold)!

The Real *Dharma-glani*

An Avatara manifests Himself whenever there is *dharma-glani* (virtue getting overpowered by vice). At the inner (micro-cosmic) level, it is only when an aspirant's heart is overpowered by a deep anguish and enveloped, as it were, by an *anirvachaniya glani*

(indescribable sorrow) that the divine Lord chooses to manifest in his heart. And this too, when the aspirant has come to the end of his tether, having tried and tried and tried, but just finding it unable to penetrate into the realm



of Light; helplessly attempting but unable to deliver that last punch, that final blow, that would make the unconscious explode and get annihilated at one stroke—the final stroke that would ignite and illumine the whole inner being.

When the aspirant is at the brink of such a psychological and spiritual crisis (this being the real *dharma-glani*), the Divine Lord chooses

to manifest in his heart. The joy and rapture of a Ramakrishna then become the property, the inherited wealth, of the aspirant. Describing such a *coming of the Divine* into one's heart, Swamiji wrote in his famous poem 'Kali the Mother':

Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes.

The dance of destruction is the annihilation of the self—of all smallness, littleness, self-seeking, egocentricity. When all these get burnt up in *jnanagni*, 'the fire of divine Wisdom', then, and only then, does the Mother come. Swamiji ends his famous Bengali poem '*Nachuk Tahate Shyama*', translated into English under the title, 'Let Shyama Dance There' with the following immortal lines:

Shattered be little self, hope, name, and fame;
Set up a pyre of them and make thy heart,
A burning-ground.
And let Shyama dance there.

Ramakrishna's Rapturous Dance

If we want Ramakrishna, the embodiment of joy, to come into our hearts, we need to burn away all desires, *vasanas*, without the least trace and in that cremation ground of the heart which then becomes the seat of *nirvasana upasana* [the worship of the desirelessness], Ramakrishna would come and dance his joyous dance—the dance of Nataraja in the *chidambara*, the cave of our heart (*hridaya-guha*). And may it be our great good fortune that in this very life we shall witness in our Heart of hearts this divine dance of Ramakrishna!

With the darkness of ignorance dispelled and all *vasanas* and ego- limitations burnt in the divine fire of *jnana* in the secret chamber of the Heart irradiated by the Light supreme—in that divine Illumination of the *daharakasha*, the Inner Space, let Ramakrishna, the Embodiment of India's Eternal Spiritual Culture, dance his rapturous dance! □



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3. The Master as I saw him, pp.167-68
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My religion consists of a humble adoration of an Illimitable Intelligence which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive terms. . . The most sublime and most beautiful emotion one could feel is that of the mystical. It is truly the sower of science. He who is a stranger to this emotion, who can no longer stand in rapt awe, is as good as dead. To know what is Impenetrable really exists manifesting Itself as the Highest Wisdom and the most Radiant Beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive forms, this intuition, this awareness, is at the core of religious and mystical consciousness. This cosmic spiritual consciousness is the mainspring of all scientific research.

—Albert Einstein

Indian Women

The Custodians of India's Ageless Culture

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Women In the Vedic Times

When Swami Vivekananda was travelling around in India *incognito*, prior to his going to America, he was deeply pained by the status of women in his motherland. He was already reading widely and deeply our scriptures and realised that women even in the Vedic times were very advanced. There were women poets and they could lead a life of high thinking and teaching. They were known as Brahmasiddhantas. The eminent Vedic scholar Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar says:

As women are indispensable for the growth of the society, the Veda prays to God asking for women and that they should be immensely intelligent. At one stage the Veda prays for the needs of the human race and asks for intelligent, cultured women. Men and women are, of course, equal partners in helping the growth of the society. But since a wife looks after every one in a family including the husband, she needs to have a good deal of intelligence. Since a family is sustained by a woman's intelligence, the Veda prays for intelligence to women. Intelligence alone is not enough: culture is also a must, says the Veda:

*purandhiyoshaa jaayataam striyuvatipriyaa bhavukaa
Priya bhavukaa yuvaa pumaanapriyo bhavukaa.'*

Coming from an area that set high the Mother Goddess with its chanting of *Chandi*, the status of women in his own time puzzled Vivekananda no end. Had he not himself charmed his guru Sri Ramakrishna and others by his music worshipping the Divine Mother?

And yet women were in this poor state in India. They were uneducated, given away in marriage early and locked up in domesticity, and they looked prematurely old, 'burdened by the sorrow and struggle in time'. Or, if they were on their own, they were 'fallen women'. The first thing that struck Swami Vivekananda when he went to America was the self-confidence of the women in that land and he at once knew the source: education.

Womanhood, the Indian Ideal

Swami Vivekananda did not want a clone of the western woman for India. He knew that Indian womanhood was a carrier of the peerless culture of the land. Women here should not lose their cultural moorings which gave us the strong base of the family unit. In his address delivered at the Shakespeare Club House, in Pasadena, California, on January 18, 1900, Swami Vivekananda was subjected to questions on Indian women as at that time the Christian preachers used to



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make a big hue and cry about the child widow phenomenon. Indeed that day some persons wanted him to speak on Indian women so that they could show him at a disadvantage. One questioner said in a challenging tone: 'Has your philosophy and religion lifted your women above our women?'

Unfazed, Swamiji proceeded to speak on Indian women that day, a speech of which we all are proud today [see Swamiji's *Complete Works*, 2:411-26]. After giving the audience an idea of the vastness of the nation, the various races who makes up a vast sea of humanity with eighteen languages (not mere dialects) and the divisions of caste, the Swami said that Indian women were indeed subject to certain social restrictions. But then this was not unique, for each nation has its own ways of tradition and life-style. Nations also have their own shaping ideals:

Now, the ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother... In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there—as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes: the wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.

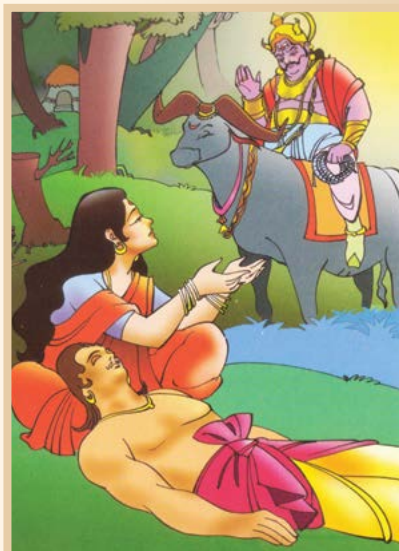
Having presented a sheet-anchor for the family down the generations in the mother, with the daughter-in-law taking over automatically when the mother-in-law passes away, Indian genius set about making woman responsible for domestic felicity. And where a family is run well, there is good for the society at large as well. Staying at home,

the Indian woman was put in charge of the home-treasures, the cultural heritage of India. So strong has been this sense of responsibility that the Indian woman does not easily let go of received customs.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of Kuladharmā as one of the factors that have sustained the Indian culture despite the internal and external attempts to derail it. He names four instruments of order which have held the Hindu society together: An 'ever enlarging number of authorized scriptures', kuladharmā, priesthood and guru param-paras. Of these, the guardian of kuladharmā has always been the woman. She has been in charge of the family and even if the husband or son has gone out on hunting, business or for

war, she has kept the home-fires burning and brought up the next generation in the ideals for which the Indian nation is famous. The continuity of traditions has been her gift to modern India.

Way back in the days of the Mahābhārata, the Pandavas and Draupadī were in exile. To them came Rishi Markandeya and recounted tales of spiritual heroism that had been acted out 'long, long ago'. Among the stories are that of Savitri-Satyavan and Nala-



Damayanti. From this we can gauge how far back in history goes Indian's woman-power. Yet, even today their names evoke the *utsaha* of the modern woman to walk in their way, empower herself with yoga as Savitri, or get a defeated husband back to his original station like Damayanti.

In Modern Times

It was not very long ago that the Indian independence movement under Gandhi's leadership saw thousands of men court imprisonment. What happened to their families? Repeatedly the woman left behind in charge of the house went through all the indignities and uncertainties of being the wife of a jailed man but she fed the children by herself toiling at home and outside, and brought up the children in the shadow of the heroes and heroines of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This was possible because Indian women have been rooted in religion and have held on to a firm faith in the Supreme Being. Since in India the sacred and the secular are beautifully, irrevocably intertwined, one has helped sustain the other.

Take the lambent faith the Indian woman exhibits towards trees even today. With the same faith that Savitri had in the guidance of the Supreme and her own determination, women perform the Vat Savitri Vrata in Maharashtra. This occurs on the full moon day of the month of Jyeshtha (May-June). Hindu women worship the banyan tree and pray for their husband's long life. Considered holy, the banyan tree is never injured. There is the gooseberry tree which is worshipped too. Is there a tree which is not worshipped as holy in India?

Though times have changed and the western breeze has blown away such healthy beliefs, it is touching to see women cling

to them. Perhaps this holding on to the beliefs of our ancients gave us the famous Chipko Movement to stop de-forestation. The Movement was no recent phenomenon. It is traced to the 18th century when hundreds of persons belonging to the Bishnoi community led by Amrita Devi hugged the trees and prevented loggers from cutting them down with axes. This happened in the village of Khejrali in Rajasthan. In the 'seventies of the last century women came up again in the Himalayan region and successfully turned the tide till green cover returned to the hills. Women have considered the trees holy because they are also the providers of livelihood to the villagers. The religious spirit of women was able to help conservation of the environment. Recently (July 7, 2012) Sujoy Dhar wrote in *India Current Affairs* the heart-warming news about such a brave stand by women:

Under the green canopy of towering Sal trees, a small white shrine is home to a clutter of baked earth animal idols. Phoolmani, 45, a tribal woman in eastern India's state of Odisha, worships here every day. In the silence of this forest, which is a primary source of sustenance for Phoolmani, who lives in the Budhikhamari cluster of villages on the edge of Baripada town in Mayurbhanj district, faith meets livelihood options.

For women belonging to local tribes like Santhal, Kolha and Lodha, making Sal leaf plates is one of the key income generating activities. They also collect mahua flowers, mushrooms and other non-timber forest products. 'This forest belongs to us. It offers us our livelihood. Here, among these trees, we also pray to our gods. They protect us, just as we, in turn, protect the forest by guarding it all day in rotational groups,' states Phoolmani, emphatically.

Interestingly, Indian women, even when they are abroad, do their best to keep their

cultural moorings intact and thereby keep alive the message of our classical heroes and heroines. I have come across housewives in the United States celebrating the various Hindu festivals with joy, bringing people together and replicating the Indian ethos, whether it is Varalakshmi vrata, the Navratri, the Krishna Janmashtami or Vinayaka Chathurti. One hundred years ago the Indian youth was becoming totally alienated from the treasury of love, heroism, faith and self-sacrifice conveyed through stories related in the two epics and many Puranas. Sister Nivedita watched the jettisoning of India's great past by the educated Indians, but she did not lose hope because she had full faith in the Indian woman. It was she who revealed to us how women—rich or poor, educated or illiterate—had been the custodians of Indian culture. In the preface to her *Cradle Tales of Hinduism*, she said:

And in the life of every child amongst the Hindu higher castes, there comes a time when, evening after evening, hour after hour, his grandmother pours into his ears these memories of old.

This is why she would never call Indian women as ever having been illiterate. They had imbibed the best in the Indian tradition and strove to bring up their children as a Rama or Krishna, Arjuna or Karna, Sita or Savitri.

Rekindling and Reaffirming the Ideal

As we celebrate the 150th Jayanti of Swami Vivekananda, it becomes imperative for the Indian woman to strive hard and retain her superior position as the custodian of the nation's culture. In no other land do we have role-models as in India: there is verily a roll call of good and great women who have faced life's problems boldly and sent a sterling message down the generations. They were thrown into the cauldron of terrifying problems, yet, none,

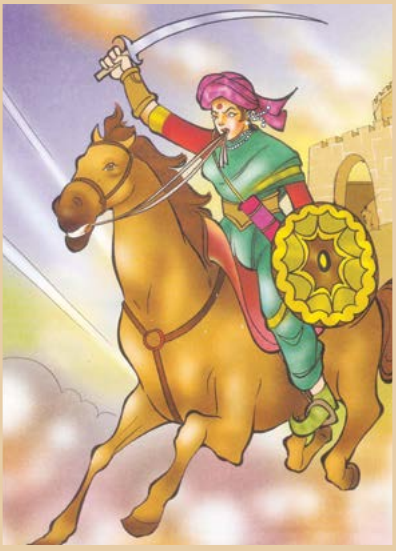
not one heroine did contemplate suicide. They never took the easy way out, whether it was Sita, Kunti, Devayani or Kannagi. No, not even Ahalya who had allowed herself to be violated in a moment of weakness. But by sheer tapasya and self-denial, she retrieved her prime position as a chaste woman and even today we remember their names daily to be rid of any sins performed knowingly or unknowingly: Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari.

It is an amazing phenomenon that meditating upon our great past, women have continued to preserve the best in our culture. It could be the rangoli patterns she makes daily in front of her house, at least a tiny one, bringing a sense of beauty and holiness to

an apparently mundane activity; the dressing up of her children as Krishnas and Ramas for this or that festival; the waving of auspicious arti lights when bringing a bride home; the singing of lullabies that speak of Krishna's pranks or Kausalya's love. Never, never will she sing of babies on the tree top cradle which falls down when a bough breaks or Jack and Jill injuring themselves when they went up the hill. It is religion that has ruled the Indian woman's world all these millennia; and they



give all the images she needs to bring up her children as healthy citizens, physically and mentally. In spite of some deluded feminists, she has retained her faith in being an affectionate daughter, a *saha-dharma-chari* as a wife, a love that has no tangle as a mother and a guardian of the needy and the underprivileged as a woman. Her culture has taught her to suffer for a good cause; and if we have to suffer, it is worthwhile to suffer for the sake of Indian culture. This suffering would be



due to physical and spiritual heroism and such suffering is always welcome. Haven't we thrilled to read Swami Vivekananda speak of the Rani of Jhansi? She suffered, she died, but what if?

This mild Hindu race produces fighting women from time to time. Some of you may have heard of the

woman (Lakshmi Bai, Queen of Jhansi) who, during the Mutiny of 1857, fought against the

English soldiers and held her own ground for two years—leading modern armies, managing batteries and always charging at the head of her army. This queen was a Brahmin girl.

Even today we sing of her and receive the needed strength of purpose from the powerful poem on the warrior-queen by Subhadrakumari Chauhan:

The throne got shook, and the tension erupted among the Raajvanshs, the royal heirs of the throne, In aged India, a new wave of youth was spreading, All the inhabitants of India had realized the worth of their lost freedom, All of them had decided to get rid of the British rule, The old swords started glittering again like new ones in the form of the freedom movement in 1857. From the mouths of the Bandelas and the Harbolas (Religious singers of Bandelkhand), we heard the tale of the courage of the Queen of Jhansi relating how gallantly she fought like a man against the British intruders: such was the Queen of Jhansi.¹

We would do well to remember that the parampara continues for Subhadrakumar Chauhan (1904-1948) was herself a freedom fighter. She was in the Non-Cooperation Movement and was the first satyagrahi to be arrested in Nagpur. With a glorious track-record as the carrier of the best in Indian tradition and culture as was demonstrated to us by the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, the Indian woman has a tremendous responsibility in shaping the future. With the Mother's blessings, she will succeed. □



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सिंहासन हिल उठे राजवंशों ने भृकुटी तानी थी,
बूढ़े भारत में आई फिर से नयी जवानी थी,
गुमी हुई अज़ादी की कीमत सबने पहचानी थी,

दूर फिरंगी को करने की सबने मन में ठीनी थी।
चमक उठी सन सत्तावन में, वह तलवार पुरानी थी,
बुंदेले हरबोलों के मुँह हमने सुनी कहानी थी,
खूब लड़ी मर्दानी वह तो झाँसी वाली रानी थी॥

Holy Mother: An Epitome of Indian Culture

V. V. JAYARAMAN

What is Culture?

Civilization contributes to the pleasures and amenities of life while culture conduces to its refinement. The one improves the objective world and makes Nature subservient to men who derive both profit and pleasure by their mastery of her secrets, while the other chastens the mind and purifies the soul. Both reflect the yearnings and aspirations of men, their struggles and success in the march of life.

Aspects of Indian Culture

Our culture which has survived is the outcome of centuries of growth and development and possesses a remarkable power of endurance and vitality. Our culture is unique in that it shuns all worldliness. Its backbone is unworldliness—renunciation. Another remarkable feature is its all-embracing nature—its catholicity. It is highly introspective. It made all people to look into the world of intensions and not the world of extension. It is this introspection that enabled many to unravel different mysteries. Love and sympathy are inextricably interwoven with it. ...

Not only men played a great part in, India's spiritual progress but also women had a lion's share in it. Women like Vach, Maitreyi, Gargi, Uma, Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, and a host of others who were the very

personification of holiness, charity, purity and chastity descended down upon earth to adorn our land and show to the world what women



could do. To that galaxy of great women goes our Holy Mother to enhance its eternal glory by her own ineffable, inimitable and immaculate character.

□ Reprinted from *Vedanta Kesari*, 1957, December Pp 344

We find from the following typical examples how the women of past were. We find Vak as a seer Vak, daughter of the sage Ambhrina, asserted herself as a seer exhibiting to the world that there is no sex in soul. Next coming to Maitreyi we find her as a seeker of knowledge. She excelled all by her enormous erudition. Again we find Uma as a teacher who taught a lesson to the Devas about the Omnipresence, Omnipotence and Omniscience of the Lord. In Sita, Savitri and others we have typical Hindu wives and mothers. The unique nature of Holy Mother is that we find all these combined and represented as one in her.

Hindu Conception of a Woman

No other country paid so much of respect to women as our Motherland. If our country is famous today, this also constitutes one of the reasons. The people of the past never let down women, and their attitudes towards them were magnificent. A woman was considered as half of man and the helpmate in crossing the ocean of *samsara*. A husband and wife form two bodies and one soul. There was no loftier conception than this. She was considered as the Goddess, Devi, as Nature, Prakriti and as the whole relative universe, Maya. She was considered as the Sakti that creates, conserves and destroys. These conceptions are very beautifully expounded in the life of the Holy Mother.

Ideal of Marriage and Wifehood

According to our scriptures, marriage is not a mere physical union but a union of souls. It is the path of purification and perfection. It is not for mundane pleasures but for the elevation of souls and enrichment of lives. A husband and wife should live with perfect harmony and understanding. They are considered as spiritual partners each of whom

supplements the other and both proceed towards the ultimate goal.

An ideal wife always works for her husband's pleasure and peace. Poet Valmiki puts it very clearly and beautifully thus:

That woman who though noblest of all and given to the practice of vows and fasts does not look after her husband, will indeed obtain an unmeritorious future.

Even if a woman has never bowed to the gods and has ceased to worship them, she obtains the highest heaven by serving her husband.

Ideal of Motherhood

Our conception of Motherhood is also superb. It is a higher state than wifehood. Motherhood sanctifies a woman. She forgets herself and works hard for the safety and satisfaction of her children. She becomes self-forgetful, purifies herself and becomes sacred.

Ideal of Nun

Wifehood and motherhood are the gradual processes of purification and perfection. There are some people who have an unshakable faith and urgent appetite to reach salvation. They easily emancipate themselves from the thralldom of ignorance by renouncing the worldly wealth and earthly pursuits. It is said—'Not by action, not by progeny and not by wealth but by renunciation alone immortality can be achieved.' They completely root out in them the sexual and acquisitive instincts known in Hindu scriptures as lust and lucre. They excel motherhood by their universal and all-embracing love.

Holy Mother's life is an exemplary one to expound all these ideals very clearly. From her childhood we find in her the virtue of compassion glowing which later revealed itself in the unrivalled Motherhood. When

Sarada was young there came a famine in Bengal. Her father being a man of charitable disposition used to serve food to the suffering people. Pots after pots of Khichuri was cooked and emptied. The famine-stricken and hungry people used to be impatient as the stuff was hot. Young Sarada used to fan tirelessly the hot stuff unable to bear the agony and affliction of people so that it could be taken sooner. From her childhood she had two clay images of Kali and Lakshmi. She worshipped them and attended all religious festivals. Thus from her childhood she absorbed and assimilated the ideals and traditions of Hindu culture.

Holy Mother makes a more indelible impression in her life as a wife. The rumour that her husband was a lunatic could not move her. She lived with undisturbed tranquility with her father with all her thoughts centred upon her husband. What a perfect tranquility! What a firm, faith! Indeed, faith is the secret of greatness.

She lived with her husband as a typical Hindu wife. She took a great delight in serving him. She absorbed from him, from his reservoir of experiences, all knowledge ranging from household duties to the knowledge of Brahman. Both the hearts were intent upon reaching the Infinite and so Ramakrishna lived as an ideal husband and Saradamani as an ideal wife.

The unity between them is revealed when she replied that she had not come to drag him into Maya but only to help him in his religious life. Their harmony and unity reached the climax when the Shodasi Puja (worship of the Divine Mother) was performed. The priest and the Goddess were joined in a transcendental union in the Self. The Master saw divinity in her and she not only revealed herself as Shakti but also saw divinity in her husband.

She herself said later, 'What Ramakrishna is, that I am', thus showing the relationship between her and the Master.

Thus we see how Saradamani, who wanted to be pure as the spotless tube-roses, lived with her divine husband as an ideal wife surrendering herself to him with deep respect and reverence, not only helping him externally but also grasping the central principle of his life as a part and parcel of herself and imbibing the spirit of the Master so thoroughly that she could continue his life's mission afterwards.

Holy Mother's life after the demise of her husband is still more appealing and influencing. She, after her husband's death, revealed herself as limelight with an abundant measure of love for all. She really exhibited herself as Skakti, Devi, and Saraswati. It was left to her to spread the message of the Master and be a torch-bearer of knowledge to all, showing light to those who suffered in darkness. She was a balsamic anodyne to the lacerated hearts and always a source of solace, strength and satisfaction. She practised more than what she preached and so 'truths from her lips prevailed with double sway'.

Her Spiritual Ministration

Holy Mother initiated many into spiritual life by giving mantra. She treated all as one. In her eyes a saint or a sinner, the rich or the poor had no difference. She had an intense hunger for the service of humanity. Her desire for helping others was so much that she did not wait to see whether the person who sought her help really deserved her help or not. 'Her pity gave ere charity began'. She was generous to a fault. The conception of getting a reception at her hands never became a deception. Her help was extended to all irrespective of caste, creed or other differences. She could treat Amzad,

the Muslim dacoit, in the same way as Sarat (Swami Saradananda). She would remark, 'Who else will bear the responsibilities of the sinner and afflicted?'

The Mother by her enormous spiritual power removed the distress of people and could transform even the most morally degraded and evil minded by her blessings. She herself said about those who came to take refuge in her thus:

Several of those who come here are up to anything in life. No type of sin has been left undone by them. But when they come here and address me as mother, I forget everything and they get more than they deserve.

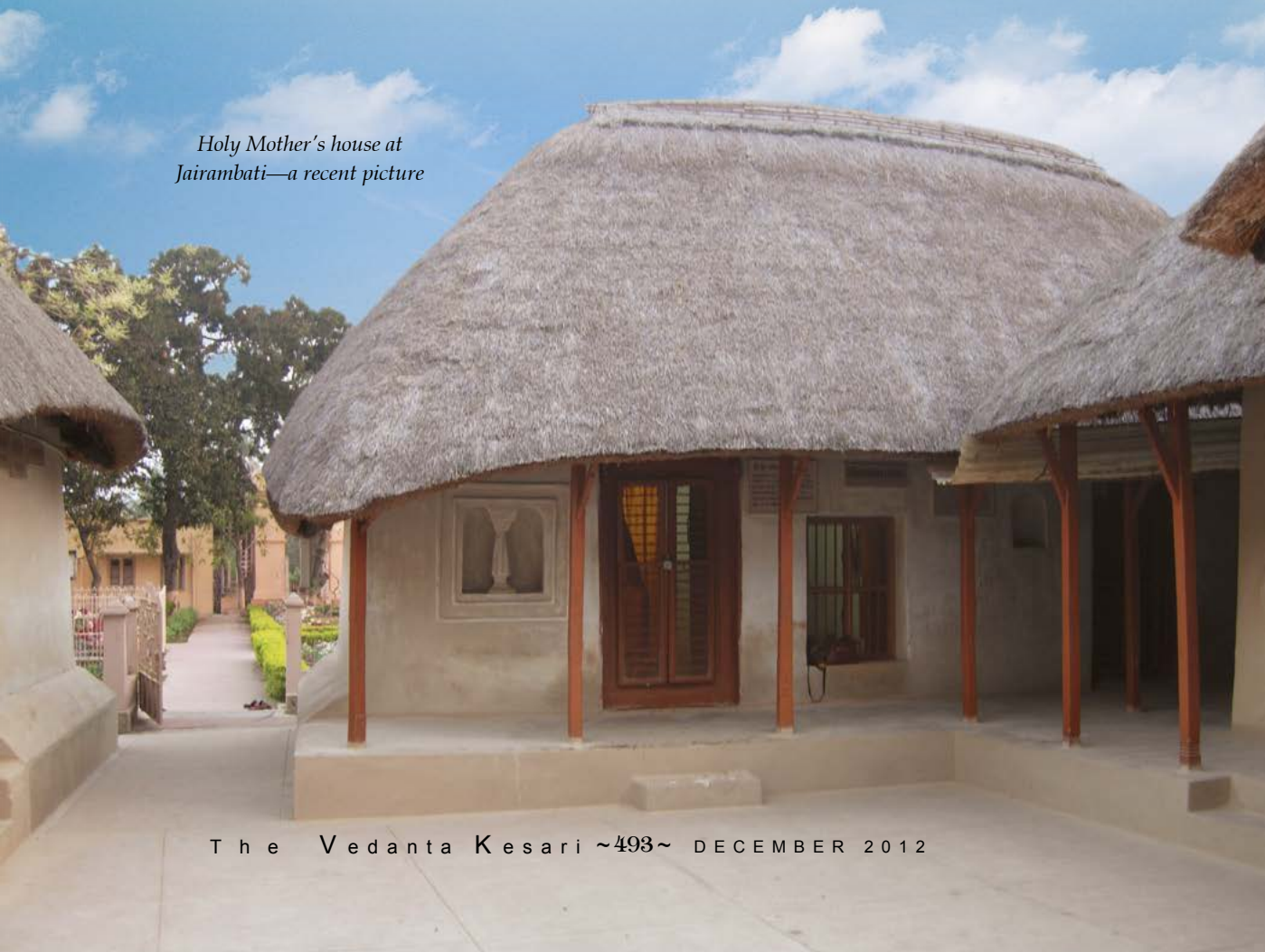
Once when some one protested against her blessing a young man who had gone astray she bluntly said: 'If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?'

Enigmatical were the ways of Mother. She lived in the material world merging her individuality with her Master's. She shared the joys and sorrows of her children but still all her thoughts were centred in her Master. . .

May the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Saradamani be on us for ever and for ever and we live long to be the worthy sons and daughters of such a glorious country is my constant prayer. □



*Holy Mother's house at
Jairambati—a recent picture*



Namaste—the Indian Way of Greeting

Folding hands together with a smile to greet, Namaste is a common cultural practice in India. Namaste or Namaskar or Namaskaram is a common verbal salutation in India. It is a customary greeting when one meets or takes leave of others.

While saying Namaste, one commonly does this by a slight bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards, in front of the chest. It can also be done without words and carries the same meaning.

Namaste is derived from Sanskrit and is a combination of two words, *namah* and *te* (a shortened variant of *tubhyam*). *Namah* means 'bow', 'obeisance', 'reverential salutation' or 'adoration' and *te* means 'to you' (dative case of 'you'). Therefore, Namaste literally means 'bow to you' translated as 'I bow to you'.

Namaste is also a friendly greeting in written communication. When the hand position is higher, it usually means reverence and/or worship. The expression with hands placed on top of one's head is usually the sign of utmost reverence or respect. The gesture Namaste represents and acknowledges the belief that there is a Divine spark within each of us. Hence, Namaste means, 'I bow to you' or 'the divine within me greets the divine in you'. The gesture is widely used throughout Asia and beyond. It appears in c.4000 years ago on the clay seals of the Indus Valley Civilization.

In Telugu, the gesture is known as Namaskaramulu or simply Namaskaram. In Tamil, it is known as *kumbidu*, which is composed of *kumbu* meaning 'to cup hands' and *idu*, 'to do'. Vanakkam in Tamil too means the same. In Kannada, the gesture is known as Namaskara. In Japan, the Namaste hand gesture is used in prayer and healing sessions and is called Gassho. Namaste is also in vogue in Sri Lankan and Nepalese cultures. Sikhs also fold their hand as in Namaste, but their greeting is Sat Sri Akal.

Another way of greeting common in India is *pranam* or *charana-sparsh*, the touching of elder's feet. It is an act of showing respect. When greeting, children touch the feet of their elders in the family while people of all ages will bend to touch the feet of a great guru, murti or icon of a God or Goddess.

One can do Pranam in the way of Ashtangana (touching the ground with knees, belly, chest, hands, elbows, chin, nose, temple) or Bhumishtha (bowing forehead down and touching the ground). There are, however, many variations in offering pranam depending upon one's health, availability of time and other factors. □



New India and Old India

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

On one side, new India is saying, 'We should have full freedom in the selection of husband and wife; because the marriage, in which are involved the happiness and misery of all our future life, we must have the right to determine according to our own free will.' On the other, old India is dictating, 'Marriage is not for sense-enjoyment, but to perpetuate the race. This is the Indian conception of marriage. By the producing of children, you are contributing to, and are responsible for, the future good or evil of the society. Hence society has the right to dictate whom you shall marry and whom you shall not. That form of marriage obtains in society which is conducive most to its well-being; do you give up your desire of individual pleasure for the good of the many.'

On one side, new India is saying, 'If we only adopt Western ideas, Western language, Western food, Western dress, and Western manners, we shall be as strong and powerful as the Western nations'; on the other, old India is saying, 'Fools! By imitation, other's ideas never become one's own; nothing, unless earned, is your own. Does the ass in the lion's skin become the lion?'

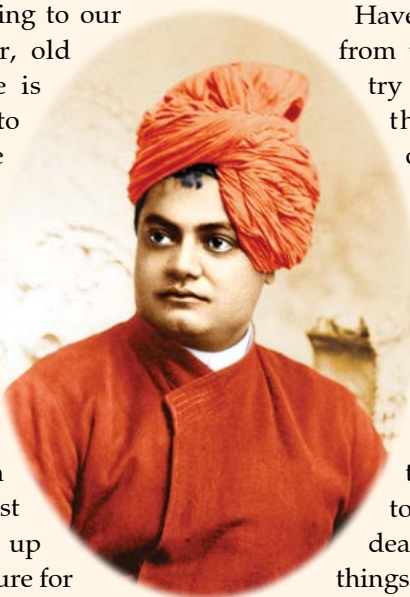
On one side, new India is saying, 'What the Western nations do is surely good,

otherwise how did they become so great?' On the other side, old India is saying, 'The flash of lightning is intensely bright, but only for a moment; look out, boys, it is dazzling your eyes. Beware!'

Have we not then to learn anything from the West? Must we not need try and exert ourselves for better things? Are we perfect? Is our society entirely spotless, without any flaw? There are many things to learn, we must struggle for new and higher things till we die—struggle is the end of human life. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'As long as I live, so long do I learn.' That man or that society which has nothing to learn is already in the jaws of death. Yes, learn we must many things from the West: but there are fears as well.

A certain young man of little understanding used always to blame the Hindu Shastras before Sri Ramakrishna. One day he praised the Bhagavad-gita, on which Shri Ramakrishna said, 'Methinks, some European Pandit has praised the Gita, and so he has also followed suit.'

O India, this is your terrible danger. The spell of imitating the West is getting such a strong hold upon you that what is good or what is bad is no longer decided by reason,



judgment, discrimination, or reference to the Shastras. Whatever ideas, whatever manners the white men praise or like are good; whatever things they dislike or censure are bad. Alas! what can be a more tangible proof of foolishness than this?

The Western ladies move freely everywhere, therefore that is good; they choose for themselves their husbands, therefore that is the highest step of advancement; the Westerners disapprove of our dress, decorations, food, and ways of living, therefore they must be very bad; the Westerners condemn image-worship as sinful, surely then, image-worship is the greatest sin, there is no doubt of it!

The Westerners say that worshipping a single Deity is fruitful of the highest spiritual good, therefore let us throw our gods and goddesses into the river Ganga! The Westerners hold caste distinctions to be obnoxious, therefore let all the different castes be jumbled into one! The Westerners say that child-marriage is the root of all evils, therefore that is also very bad, of a certainty it is!

We are not discussing here whether these customs deserve continuance or rejection; but if the mere disapproval of the Westerners be the measure of the abominableness of our manners and customs, then it is our duty to raise our emphatic protest against it.

O India! Forget not that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget

not that the God thou worshippes is the great Ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Shankara, the Lord of Uma; forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for thy individual personal happiness; forget not that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood; forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.' Say, 'The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother.' Thou, too, clad with but a rag round thy loins proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice: 'The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God. India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age.'

Say, brother; 'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good,' and repeat and pray day and night, 'O Thou Lord of Gauri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O Thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a Man!' (CW, 4:476-480) □

The Indian nation cannot be killed. Deathless it stands and it will stand so long as that spirit shall remain as the background, so long as her people do not give up their spirituality. Beggars they may remain, poor and poverty-stricken; dirt and squalor may surround them perhaps throughout all time, but let them not give up their God, let them not forget that they are the children of the sages. Just as in the West even the man in the street wants to trace his descent from some robber-baron of the Middle Ages, so in India, even an Emperor on the throne wants to trace his descent from some beggar-sage in the forest, from a man who wore the bark of a tree, lived upon the fruits of the forest and communed with God. That is the type of descent we want; and while holiness is thus supremely venerated, India cannot die. —**Swami Vivekananda**, CW, 4:160

The Spiritual Basis of Indian Culture

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

The Foundation of Indian Culture

Culture is like the foundation of a building; civilization is its superstructure. Culture is like the subconscious and unconscious mind; civilization is like the conscious mind. Just as the subconscious mind governs and guides the conscious mind, civilization is governed and guided by culture which is, as it were, the collective unconscious. So, the question: What is the nature of Indian culture? What is the foundation of Indian society? What constitutes its conscious mind? What constitutes the subconscious mind? What are the motives and direction in which India has been moving and acting through the ages?

The principles, which form the foundation of India's cultural heritage, were established as the result of observation, study and experiment of facts of human existence. We call this study as religion. Religion, in the Indian sense, is a science, the highest one at that. The Mundaka Upanishad declares that that science is the greatest which makes man know that which never changes and by knowing which everything is known. It was this science, the science of the soul, that became the national characteristic,

the vitality of the Indian race. Even in the two known non-Brahmanical movements—Jainism and Buddhism—this characteristic is maintained. This science, especially the principle of spiritual



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oneness underlying the great variety of creation, is the basis of Indian culture. It not only resolved all contradictions and the differences, but it also embraced life in all its aspects and formed the basis on which social organizations were founded.

A Historical Survey

The Indian cultural history can be studied under four phases or periods.

In the *first phase*, the Aryans and Dravidians interacted with each other and Sanskrit language and the Vedas came into existence. The Rishis put before the Hindus four *purusharthas* i.e. legitimate goals to be pursued in life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*—righteousness, wealth, fulfilment of desires and freedom or ultimate liberation. Enjoyment and acquisition of wealth were considered legitimate but they must be pursued in accordance with the rules of social conduct and fulfillment of social responsibility or *dharma*. The idea was that, while acquiring wealth and fulfilling desires is important from the viewpoint of leading life in the world, they must be done within the rigours of *dharma*—righteousness and social sanction. Thus the individual will gradually realize that such engagements gave partial and temporary satisfaction and would finally seek *moksha*, or absolute spiritual freedom. Thus, the whole Indian culture was aimed at the final *purushartha*, the *moksha*, spiritual emancipation.

It is not that every Indian all the time was a philosopher or a man of the spirit; nor that wealth (*artha*) and pleasure (*kama*) were not pursued by people in India. But there seems to be something in her very soil and air which makes a man at some stage or the other in his life realize the futility of finite ends and seek for righteousness (*dharma*) and then, *moksha*, the final infinitude.

The *second phase* of Indian cultural history is dominated by the two great revolts against the Vedic culture by the two streams of Shramana culture: Jainism and Buddhism. In fact the seeds of these revolts can be seen in the Upanishads themselves. Indian soil and its spiritual roots could not, as it were, bear the decline of spirituality in the form of excessive emphasis on Vedic ritualism and associated animal sacrifice with a view to achieving happiness in heaven. It will be improper to assess the spiritual basis of Indian culture only by the study of the Brahmaical culture. The Shramana culture is as much spiritual as the Brahmanical culture, if not more. While in the Brahmanical culture, the four *purusharthas* are advocated, the Shramana culture, whose representatives Buddhism and Jainism are, emphasizes *moksha* or *nirvana* as the only goal of life. Asceticism and total renunciation, both internal and external, are considered essential.

While Buddhism does not believe in a soul, it does believe in a state called *nirvana* which is beyond all suffering, as the goal of life. Jainism does accept a conscious entity, soul, and advocates its liberation from non-conscious material (*pudgal*) as the goal of life. In other words, both these cultures are spiritual. Millions and millions of Jains and Buddhists have been struggling and trying to attain those coveted goals. Every Jain for example, asks himself this vital question when he comes of age: 'Can I take up the life of total renunciation, *sannyasa*, to attain salvation?' When he finds, on introspection, that he cannot embrace such a rigorous life of *sannyasa*, he opts for the second alternative, the worldly life. In some of the sects of Buddhism, children and adolescents live as recluses for some years with the idea of getting a taste of the monastic life as well as for their own personal assessment whether they can take up the monastic life

permanently. Thus, the Shramana culture has contributed to the spiritual store of Indian culture and is akin to Brahmanical culture.

It must be remembered that the concept of Indian nationhood was never a political one but cultural, which in turn was inspired by spirituality. If Rama and Krishna, the Divine Incarnations, were born in the North, their great proponent Acharyas—Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, and Vallabha—all were from the South. Preceded by the great Advaitist, Acharya Shankara, they too carried the message of spirituality across the length and breadth of the country. Our illustrious saints, Bhikkus, and Tirthankaras never stayed at one place but went from one part of the land to the other and thus reinforced spirituality.

In the *third phase*, we find ancient Indian culture—a product of Vedic, Jain and Buddhist spiritual traditions—grappling with violent and aggressive Islam. There was virtually no political resistance to Islam in India. Of course, the great Shivaji and Sikh Gurus offered in what may be termed as socio-spiritual resistance and it largely helped the populace to remain spiritually strong. India responded to this challenge by what is now recognized as the Bhakti Movement. A galaxy of saints were born during this period in almost every part of the country: Nanak and Farid in the north-west, Chaitanaya and Sri Shankar Deva in the east, Alvar saints in the South, Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, Ravidass, Dadu Dayal, Meera and others in the Central India. In the Western India, we had Jnaneswar, Tukaram, Eknath, and other Varkari saints of Maharashtra, and Narsinh Mehta in Gujarat. Sufism was the product of the interaction between the spiritual elements in Islam and Hinduism.

In the *fourth phase* of the Indian cultural history, India had to face British rule and western materialism. Again, India responded

to this challenge spiritually. Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, Arya Samaj in the West, Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra and Theosophical Society and other such spiritual-social attempts were made to assimilate the unavoidable western civilization and Christianity. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and others were the products of this age of spiritual renaissance. In fact the leaders of Indian struggle for independence, barring few exceptions, were spiritually inspired.

One might speak of the present phase as the fifth phase of Indian Cultural history of future. It is the age of globalization. Now Indian spirituality has no more remained confined to the geographical boundaries of the country. It is out-reaching the remotest corners of the world through the newly laid down channels of communication. Hindu temples have come up in every continent of the world and Ashramas of various sects of Hinduism and even Jainism have mushroomed everywhere. One may find scores, if not hundreds of websites on Indian spirituality. People from all over the world are thronging Indian religious cities like Hardwar, Rishikesh, Varanasi, etc., in search of spirituality. After all, spirituality is the core of Indian culture as Swamiji said repeatedly.

Spiritual life is the true genius of India. Those who make the greatest appeal to the Indian mind are not the military conquerors, not the rich merchants or the great diplomats, but the holy sages, the Rishis who embody spirituality at its finest and purest. India's pride is that in almost every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of her recorded history, she has produced these holy men who embody for her all that the

country holds most dear and sacred. Though they generally remain away from the main stream of life, kings and commoners pay reverent homage to them and take their advice in the problems of their personal lives as well as in public affairs. By their lives they teach us that pride and power, wealth and glory, are nothing in comparison with the power of spirit.

The Varnashrama System

Apart from the four purusharthas, the Hindu society is constituted on the basis of four Varnas and four Ashramas, expressly for the ultimate spiritual goal in view. Whether one was a student or a householder, a retired person or a monk, of whatever caste: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, he or she was encouraged and expected to follow his or her codes of conduct prescribed by the *varna* or *ashrama*, and finally attain spiritual excellence. Hindu scriptures are replete with stories how a housewife or even a butcher obtained the same spiritual benefits which an ascetic had gained through yogic practices.

According to Swami Vivekananda, human society passes through four successive ages: Brahman age, Kshatriya age, Vaishya age and Shudra age. Each of these ages or Yugas has its strengths and weaknesses. The strength of a Brahmin is intellectual and spiritual power. In the Kshatriya age, the royal power is with the king; in the Vaishya age, money is the power and finally in the Shudra or the labour age, there is the collective might of the people.

It is the spiritual genius of India that in each of these four ages, the might or the power of each one was directed towards spiritual or religious goals. Whenever the caste in power became selfish and narrow-minded, and did not pursue the responsibility of nurturing the

spiritual core of the country, it was replaced by the next caste.¹

The Indian Way of Living

For a Hindu, religion is not merely a once-a-week-affair or a mere ritual. A Hindu's whole life is religious. He wakes up religiously and goes to bed religiously. He eats, does his daily chores and duties religiously. A Hindu child is conceived religiously, born religiously, starts his education religiously, marries religiously and even dies religiously. Nay, even his life beyond is observed religiously. Every major event of his life is a sacrament. An Indian's whole year is studded with religious festivals and observances. The two major harvesting periods of the year are religiously celebrated as Navaratri, characterized by fasts and vigils, charity and worship, gaiety and joy.

We may also learn about the spiritual roots of Indian culture if we travel around the country and go to the villages where the nation lives. On the bank of every little pond or lake in the village, we would find a small temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Divine Mother or the local deity. Villagers coming for bath or to collect water pay obeisance to the deity. On enquiry, we shall be told the legend behind the little shrine: that a great sage practised severe austerities and had spiritual realization at the spot or that the deity had appeared to one of the devotees in dream and had beckoned him to build the temple there. This is why when Swami Vivekananda was asked how he considered India after visiting the materialistically advanced West, he had said,

India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha!²

Art, Music and Sculpture

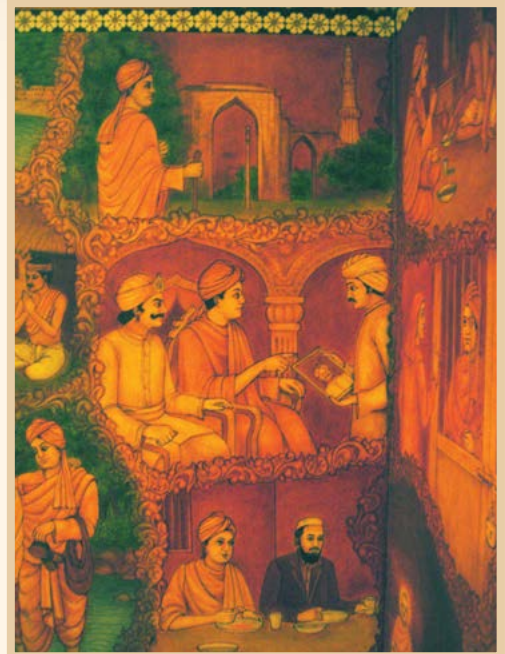
In art, music, sculpture and literature, we find indelible marks of the spiritual core of India. Apart from the Vedic Rishis who were *Kavis*, poets, India's greatest poets were all saints: Surdas, Tulsidas, Meera, Kabir, Nanak and the rest. And the themes of their poetry were naturally spiritual. In the Gita (8.9), God Himself is designated as Kavi—a Poet.

If one were to review the ancient Indian paintings, one will find without exaggeration that 80 to 90 per cent of the paintings depict the religious and spiritual themes in general and the lives of Krishna and Rama in particular. One has simply to visit Ajanta and Ellora to be convinced that it was the case even with Buddhism—art and sculpture even in Buddhistic era were spiritually based. What more proof does one need than the Jain temples of Ranakpur, or the Dilawara temples of Mount Abu to establish that Jain architecture and sculpture were spiritually oriented! The architecture and sculpture of the massive temples of Goddess Meenakshi at Madurai, Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam, Lord Shiva at Rameshvaram are proofs enough of the same.

Samaveda is the source of Indian music and is therefore ranked first among the Vedas. Sri Krishna says (Gita, 10.22): 'Among the Vedas, I am Samaveda'. Indian music, at its finest, like other Indian arts, welled forth out of the mystic experience. This art 'springs from spiritual realization and what it creates and expresses at its greatest is the spirit in form . . . the universal and cosmic individual in suggestion but not lost in individuality.'³ It has not the 'ideal physical or emotional beauty but the utmost spiritual beauty and significance.'

It is with this insight that a whole system of acoustics has been built up in the Tantras—a magnificent practical science of *Nada*, *Bindu*,

Tanmantra, *Dhvani*, *Mantra* and *Sphota*. This same cosmic vision underlies Vedic music. The singers were in possession of a high mystic idea. This mystic and occult vision is found in later music also. As recently as the 18th century, we meet Muthuswamy Dikshitar whose every song was a mantra. This is found in the best of Indian musicians who have always been mystics in



search of the eternal. Thyagaraja, one of the finest musicians the world has known, has sung: 'Is there a religious path without music and adoration?' This adoration is Bhakti. Bhakti is the life breath of the Vedic adoration of Rudra and Vishnu, the Prabandhams of the Vaishnavites, the Thevarams of Shaivites (both of south India), the Abhangas of Maharashtra, the Devaramanas of Karnataka and the Bhajans in general. The ecstatic mystic devotional music of Ramdass of Bhadrachala, Purandardass and Thyagraja are unparalleled in the history of music. The songs

of Chaitanaya, Jayadeva, Annamacharya, Meera and Kshetranya are some of the finest of this kind.⁴

Bharat Muni, the author of Natya shastra, tells us that Natyaveda was created by Lord Brahma himself. Thus Indian dramaturgy, at its core is spiritual. A large number of Sanskrit

Goddess Parvati are the performing deities of the Tandava and Lasya dance.

Conclusion

Let us conclude with the poignant statement of Sri T.M.P. Mahadevan:

Each civilization seems to have a genius for some particular aspect of life. Ancient Greece was devoted to art, and Rome to politics. But while these civilizations, and others pursuing similar ideals, perished and form now but dead chapters of history, India has stood like a 'Rock of Ages', weathering many a fierce storm, because her foundations are the eternal values of philosophy and religion, and not the shifting sands of the secular arts of beauty and governance. . . Even if the average man would forget this higher call, there have appeared in India, in an unbroken succession, spiritual leaders to remind him of his true end and show him the way. The greatest men of India have always been the messengers of the Spirit who appeal to the fundamental unity of all in the basic Reality which is spiritual, and a comprehensive outlook which knows no narrow distinctions. They are the true bearers of culture which is sweetness and light—sweetness that expresses itself as universal love, and light that is spiritual wisdom. Their call is not to 'my clan' or to 'my community', but to the whole humanity. Their message is not for a particular country or age, but for the entire world and for all time. Such seers as Yajnavalkya and Uddalka, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Gandhi and Ramana, who are the salt of the earth, have been the saviours of India and the custodians of her culture. They are a blessing not only to the country of their birth, but to the whole world.⁵ □



dramas are based on Vedic and Pauranik themes or on Ramayana and Mahabharata. As for the Indian classical dance, Lord Shiva and

References

1. cf. Swami Vivekananda's article: *Modern India*, CW, 4
2. *Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2.152
3. John Woodroffe, *Garland of Letters*, p 236
4. cf. *The Bases of Indian Culture*, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1971, p.508-9
5. *Cultural Heritage of India*, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Volume I, pp. 163-64

Lighting the Lamp

Called *deepak* in Sanskrit, meaning lamp, a lighted oil lamp is considered a sign of auspiciousness and goodness. Light is considered as a symbol of auspiciousness, prosperity and abundance in the Indian tradition. Light is also associated with brightness of mind and understanding.

Oil lamps are commonly used in Hindu temples as well as in home shrines. Generally the lamps used in the temples are circular, either hanging or with a stand, having grooves for five wicks. They are made of metal and either pedestal. There will usually be at least one lamp in each shrine, and the main shrine may contain several. Usually only one wick occasions.

In the home shrine, the style of only one wick. There is usually a piece of In many houses, the lamp burns all day, but or both the times. In some houses, the lamp in any other lights are turned on at night. Rows of Deepavali festival.

A hand-held oil lamp and incense sticks puja ceremony. In the North of India, a ghee. On special occasions, used for puja, the most tiers of wicks.

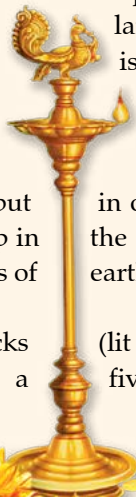
In South India, there lamps (called *vilakku*) that are traditional rituals, some of the offerings as well:

1. *Deepalakshmi*, a brass lamp with a depiction of goddess Sri Lakshmi over the back piece. they are usually small-sized and have only one wick.

2. *Nilavilakku*, a tall brass or bronze lamp on a stand where the wicks are placed at a certain height.

3. *Paavai vilakku*, a brass or bronze lamp in the form of a lady holding a vessel with her hands. This type of lamp comes in different sizes, from small to almost life-size. There are also large stone versions of this lamp in Hindu temples and shrines of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, especially at the base of columns and flanking the entrance of temples. They have only one wick.

4. *Thooku vilakku*, a brass or bronze lamp hanging from a chain, often has multiple wicks.□



Indian Cultural Values for the Youth

SWAMI ABHIRAMANANDA

Indian Culture

Indian culture is all about the art of living. Several millennia old, the culture of India refers to the faiths, beliefs, religions, customs, traditions, practices, languages, ceremonies, art and architecture, music and dance, and most importantly the values that are centred around an individual's way of life.

It is often regarded as a blend of diverse sub-cultures that are spread all over the subcontinent. If the Indian culture has had a profound influence the world over and if it is accepted as being tolerant, accommodating, open-minded, sacred, secular yet spiritual, and predominantly concerned with the common human welfare, it is due to India's unity in diversity.

The entire credit for having discovered the underlying principle of unity in diversity that has produced a common culture despite an amazingly pluralistic society belong to our forefathers—our ancient seers, sages,

mystics, religious leaders and philosophers. Swami Vivekananda said that

this expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality.¹

It is now the duty of the youth of India to preserve our culture at a time when scientific advancements, technological developments and the slow transformation to westernized way of life keep their minds preoccupied. And for youth to imbibe the Indian cultural values, an understanding of our values that are deep-rooted in our culture becomes a prerequisite.

Values in the Family

Love and respect for parents and elders, gratitude for the teacher and good care of the guests are time and again emphasized in our culture. Our scriptures proclaim, *Matri Devo Bhava, Pitri Devo Bhava, Acharya Devo Bhava, Atithi Devo Bhava*. 'Regarding one's mother and father as verily God Himself, one's teacher as God, and the guest as God' are the most important of all family values unique to India.

The Puranic story of Shravana Kumar exemplifies the devotion of a son towards his parents. The forbearance displayed by Karna in tolerating the excruciating pain when bitten through his thigh by a venomous bee so as not to disturb the peaceful sleep of his Guru Parashurama who was lying on his lap under a tree, as narrated in the Mahabharata, is another



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dramatic and telling example of the reverence a disciple had for his Guru.

It is customary in India to respect elders and bow down to them to seek their blessings. The Guru-Shishya Parampara, teacher-student tradition, of India is well-known and the teachers were held in great reverence by the students. Students learnt practical value-oriented lessons from their Guru by living with him in the Gurukula and serving him.

For generations, India has had the traditional joint family system which has nurtured the values of sharing and caring, mutual understanding, cooperation, besides being supportive, considerate, patient and helpful to one another. Arranged marriages have been the tradition in Indian society for ages. It is unfortunate that many of such value-based practices are fast declining with the advent of westernization. The traditional Gurukula system has ended up in today's much debated modern educational system. The joint family system has disintegrated into nuclear families. The traditional system of arranged marriages and is taking a slow deviation and the consequence is gradual degradation in basic family values.

Values in the Scriptures

The Vedas are the sources of Indian culture and cover the entire range of knowledge. They teach man his duties from birth to death, besides enumerating the values, virtues, morals and ethics that he is supposed to follow. They describe his obligations and responsibilities in all stages of his life—*Brahmacharya* (Student Life), *Garhasthya* (Family Life), *Vanaprastha* (Retired life), and *Sannyasa* (Preparation for Salvation).

Scriptures such as the Upanishads, through the conversations between a teacher and his student, not only speak about faith

and the ultimate goal of human life, but also spell out the qualities and traits that are required of a student. Epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are loaded with values. With dharma or righteousness as their principal guiding force, other virtues such as good conduct, true friendship, truth, non-violence, service, dedication, duty, etc., are ingrained in these epics and Puranas. Many smriti-shastras outline the laws, rules and codes of conduct applicable to individuals, communities and nations. Bhartrihari's *Neeti Shatakam* gives an exposition of morality, conduct, character, wisdom, behaviour, prudence and much more. In short, all our scriptural texts provide a framework of values aimed at making us well-groomed personalities.

Values in Nature Conservation

Mahatma Gandhiji said, 'I bow my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance.' India has always advocated an environmental friendly culture. Our ancestors saw nature as being a manifestation of God. Swami Vivekananda said, 'All this which we see around us is the outcome of that consciousness of the divine'.² Thus there was gratitude towards nature in India since time immemorial. Indians regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle divine presence—be it rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora, or the stars

and planets. It is so because the Divine reality is expressed in every manifestation of matter.

The Indian tradition is strongly Cosmo-centric, wherein man is considered to live as part of a system in which everything is related to everything else. This viewpoint on nature has been clearly enunciated in all our scriptures. This thought is therefore permeated by a reverence for all life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the *pancha mahabhutas* or the five great elements, namely



the earth, sky, air, water and fire—without which life is impossible. The same idea permeates all forms of life including plants, trees and animals; are all bound to each other within the great rhythms of nature. The divine

is seen as expressing itself through the natural phenomena. Indian culture holds that religion should protect and nurture this vibrant nature. Hence we worship the sun, the water, the land, the trees and plants which are all the very basis of human survival. As a result, nature worship and nature preservation have found place in the Indian cultural ethos since ages. Ecology is an inherent part of Indian culture.

The trees that provide man with shelter, food, fuel, and oxygen are considered the *Vriksha Devatas* [tree-gods] in our scriptures and hence worthy of worship. The Pipal, Banyan, Vilva, Amla, and Neem trees can be often spotted in our temples. There is a *sthala vriksha* or a tree associated with every temple in veneration, also thereby revealing the socio-economic aspects of the region concerned. People's knowledge of the trees and the veneration of the *sthala vrikshas* instill in them a sense of responsibility to protect the environment. Instances of South Indian kings, going out of the way to protect nature can be seen in the lives of Marudu Brothers and Pari Vallal. Once King Pari was riding on his chariot when he noticed a creeper lying on the ground. He told the charioteer to stop and got down to inspect the creeper. There was not any tree or pole nearby so that the creeper could be guided on to. His heart went out to the creeper and he told his charioteer to bring the chariot near the creeper. He then tenderly lifted the creeper and guided it onto the chariot. He returned to his palace by walk! Such was the regard that our kings had for nature.

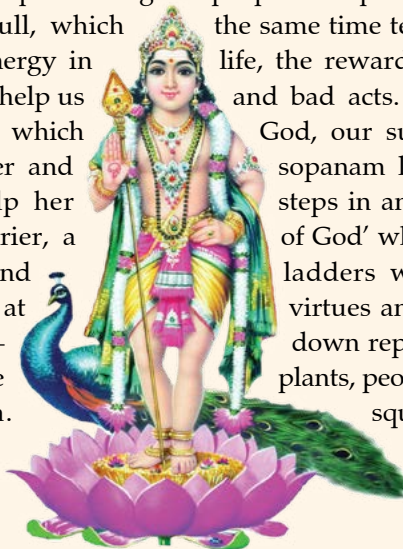
Values in Wildlife Conservation

Likewise, respect and conservation of wildlife is an integral part of Indian culture. Animals should shown due respect. In the Ramayana, Rama and Sita spent a substantial part of their life very close to nature. So also



were the righteous Pandava brothers of the Mahabharata fame. The incarnations of Vishnu remind us of biodiversity conservation. Kamadhenu was the wish-fulfilling cow whose offspring are all the cattle on earth. The cow is revered as *Gomata*, or mother goddess. It represents a symbol of non-violence and bestower of good fortune. Sri Krishna was always seen with cows around him.

But the greatest honour given to animals was their elevation as the vehicles of the gods! Lions, peacocks, eagles, and snakes, just to name a few, are part of our cultural ethos for ages. The *vahanas*, either animals or birds, symbolize the various energies that exist in the universe and each Hindu deity associated with a vahana represents his or her control over this particular energy. Saraswati's vehicle, the graceful and beautiful swan denotes that She is the controller of the pursuit of performing arts. Shiva rides the Nandi bull, which stands for the prowess and energy in man—the qualities only He can help us control. Durga rides on a lion, which symbolizes mercilessness, anger and pride—vices that she can help her devotees check. Ganesha's carrier, a mouse represents the timidity and nervousness that overwhelm us at the onset of any new venture—emotions that can be overcome by the blessings of Ganesha. The peacock, vahana of Skanda (Karthik), represents splendour and majesty.



Swami Vivekananda once said that the 'guiding motive of mankind should be charity towards men, charity towards all animals.'³ With such rich culture and heritage, where kindness and compassion were the foundations of society, there was no need for animal welfare organizations! But today times have changed. With population explosion, urbanization and consumerism catching up, animals are easy prey for human greed. They have become the targets of exploitation. Hence our youth should be taught about the necessity of adoration and preservation of Mother Nature.

Values in Games

In Indian culture, ethical values, dharma and morality were nurtured in children through games too. Traditional Indian games were not just games, they were designed in such a way that one could learn values, logical thinking, concentration, focus, etc. besides observational and mathematical skills.

An Indian invention using dice and chart, the Paramapada-sopanam or the 'Snakes and Ladders' game serves the dual purpose of providing entertainment and at the same time teaching the dos and don'ts in life, the rewards and punishments of good and bad acts. The final goal leads one to God, our supreme abode. Paramapada-sopanam literally means 'ascending in steps in an effort to reach the holy feet of God' which is the highest abode. The ladders which take us up represent virtues and the snakes which bring us down represent vices. Interspersed are plants, people and animals in the various squares. On the contrary, a game called 'Monopoly' is the most favourite game in the West wherein the players are



supposed to buy each other's property thereby attempting to make the opponent a pauper and bankrupt!

If Paramapadam teaches ethical and moral values, Pallankuzhi [a play popular in Tamilnadu] develops skill and quick thinking. Two players compete on a board consisting of between seven and twenty pits per player; each player is required to collect coins or shells or seeds with which the game is played. The player with the maximum number becomes the winner. The play enhances good memory and alertness, as the players have to count and remember the number of coins or seeds accumulated by the opponent. Chess is another Indian game invented to sharpen one's intellect.

Values in the Indian Economy

Ethics and values have guided the Indian economy and business since ancient times. The age-old savings habit that prevails among the Indians bearing in mind the need to conserve for the future coupled with a simple lifestyle has guarded us many a time from crashing economic situations, even when the entire world was facing slowdowns and recessions. In fact India is one of the high saving economies of the world. A few countries in the west were under severe financial crisis owing to the lack of savings

habit among their citizens. The tradition of saving habit is continuing even today, thanks to the contribution of the women of Indian household who have been alert, vigilant and watchful in spending the earnings, thereby facilitating the survival of their families in critical times. This is another important value the youth of today should imbibe.

Indian versus Western Cultures

Indian culture is family-oriented, society-oriented and nature-oriented whereas the western culture is individual-oriented. The family and the society get prominence over the individual in Indian culture where service and sacrifice are considered great virtues. On the other hand, individuals get prominence over the rest in the western culture. Nature is considered divine in the Indian context and hence is revered unlike the west which believes nature as meant merely for enjoyment of man. In short the western culture is materialistic in its approach whereas Indian culture is moralistic and spiritualistic, based completely on ethics and values.

Do our youths, then, have nothing to learn from the west? There is. Swami Vivekananda admired the western quality of practicing 'obedience with self-respect' which is missing in our youths. The other equally important value is learning to live together. We may gloat over the fact that the youth of India have won six medals in the recently concluded London Olympics—the highest ever in Indian history. But we should also note that they were all won in individual events like boxing, shooting and wrestling. In all the team events, our performance was dismal—the greater the number of team members, the bigger the fiasco. Our youth should learn to live in understanding and unity with each other and work in unison with a team spirit.



Renunciation and Service

Swami Vivekananda had much hope in the younger generation of India. Time and again he spoke of two important values as the national ideals that the youth of India should imbibe—renunciation and service. Besides, he gave to the world the correct interpretation of India's culture and heritage. The religious consciousness of the western society was enriched through his teachings of the Indian culture. He said,

It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. You can put a mass of knowledge into the world, but that will not do it much good. There must come culture into the blood. We all know in modern times of nations which have masses of knowledge, but what of them? They are like tigers, they are like savages, because culture is not there...⁴ Teach the masses in the vernaculars, give them ideas. They will get information, but something more is necessary; give them culture.⁵

Although technical advancements are necessary in the process of a nation's development, one should be alert to the fact

that such developments can profoundly affect the culture and tradition of a country if left unchecked.

There is, therefore, a need to stress the relevance and significance of the core aspects of our culture and tradition among our youth. This is where the role of education of a nation comes in. Only an acquaintance with India's ancient history, rational customs, glorious tradition and lineage of our ancestors will give the youth the inspiration and motivation to assimilate the eternal values that our culture embodies. Only an understanding of the sublime principles inherent in them will make their education complete—the kind of man-making and life-building education that Swami Vivekananda wished for.

In Swami Vivekananda's own words this is what the youth of modern India need to do:

Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward, and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was.⁶ □



References

- 1.CW, 1: 389 2. *ibid*, 1: 388 3. *ibid*, 2: 82 4. *ibid*, 3: 291 5. *ibid*, 3: 291 6. *ibid*, 3: 286

Prasada—the Sanctified Food

Commonly the term Prasadam or Prasada or Prasad brings to an Indian's mind a food item that one gets in a temple or after a puja at home. Prasad is not just 'after effect' of a puja or temple visit but it is something that is first *offered* to a deity in a temple or puja and only then it becomes prasada.

Prasada is a Sanskrit term. It literally means 'a gracious gift'. Anything, usually an edible food, which is first offered to a deity, saint, Perfect Master or an Avatar and then distributed in His or Her name as a good sign is considered prasada. Prasad is then considered to have the deity's blessing residing within it. Going to a temple includes receiving some prasada in some form and bringing it home for distribution to others.

Often a separate utensil or plate is kept aside to be used only for offering to the deity. First a devotee makes an offering of flowers, fruits, or sweets—which is called *naivedya*. He keeps it before an image or portrait of deity and allows sometime to pass. During that time, it is believed that the deity 'enjoys' or tastes a bit of the offering, which is then temporarily known as *bhogy*. This now-divinely-invested flower or fruit or sweet is called prasada and is received by the devotee to be partaken, worn, and or kept as a sacred souvenir. Prasada is usually distributed to devotees or family members.

In some traditions, a devotee eats only prasada, i.e., everything they eat is first offered to their chosen deity. It is not one of the items in their meals but the entire meal should be first offered to God and then eaten.

While preparing the prasada, utmost care is taken to maintain its sanctity. Care is taken not to taste it while cooking. It is not for one's own consumption but as an offering to God. It is also believed that giving prasada to others brings merit to the giver and the receiver is blessed with God's grace.

One should receive prasada with due respect. One's hands should be cleaned and preferably, one should receive it with right hand or both the hands cupped together as a mark of respect for the deity. While receiving or eating prasada, one should ensure that no part of it falls on the ground or is shown disrespect. After consuming the prasada, one should ritually wash one's hands.

Psychologically speaking, prasada is a physical representation of peace and joy that resides in one's own heart. The Gita speaks of maintenance of inner poise (*manah prasada*) as an important spiritual discipline. One should always be cheerful and calm. It is one of the mental austerities. External prasada is a gross representation of inner prasada, or peace. □



Indian Culture and Indian Youth

ARAVINDAN NEELKANDAN

India Today

In 2012, *The Lancet*, an internationally reputed medical journal, published a study that brought out some disturbing patterns in India. Every year, it is said, around 170 000 deaths occur in India by suicide of which 40%

are men and 56% women—both in the age-group of 15 to 29.¹

Suicide is just one of the many ways of self-destruction to which the youths of India are driven. For example, in Bangalore, the Silicon capital city of India, depression amongst youth has risen steadily over the past five years. Youth make up 40% of Bangalore's total 9.6 million population.² Prof. H Chandrashekhar, Head of the Department of Psychiatry at the Bangalore Medical College and also the Secretary of the Karnataka State Mental Health Authority, points out that the average age of onset of depression has fallen from 18 to 13 years.

Substance abuses, rave parties, gang violence, plaguing suicides, all these which were a few decades ago considered as the ill effects of the Western society, have exploded among the Indian youth today. What is the reason and what can be the solution? Is this the unavoidable price we have to pay for the sake of 'development' and 'modernization'?

Apart from suicides and drug abuses, those who are 'in' in the youth culture, exhibit two varying trends. One is a shallow 'pop' culture and the other is a shallow 'radical' culture. And often these two intersect each other.

The shallow 'pop' culture youth sports a 'I do not care attitude', wears his or her

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irreverent attitude on the way he or she dresses and drinks an MNC drink and listens to the western music in the i-pod. The 'radical' variety can be identified by the Che-tee shirt, the eternally angry youth sitting in an AC room ranting against the 'injustices'. Often one can find the generation XYZ and beyond embracing Che tee shirt and MNC drink with equal ease. Fashion statements make up the youth world of such people.

Why this Tragedy?

Such is the youth of India today, and if we can look deeper into this generation-next culture, we may be able to discern a yearning. A youth who commits suicide is one who has found his whole life to be a wasteland. A youth who takes pride in his addiction to an MNC brand wants to connect to the world at large and wants to confirm and compromise his identity in exchange of that connectivity. A youth who goes for substance abuse is yearning for an inner adventure and there is none to guide him.

And here is the tragic irony: the culture which they breathe and live in is a culture that can provide them the adventure, the connectivity, the justice and meaning for their life in a *much more* comprehensive and holistic manner than all their fashion statements can ever hope to make. And it is the collective failure of the society that has alienated a sizable proportion of Indian youth from receiving inner nourishment for their needs from Indian culture.

The Hanuman Therapy

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the famous psychologist, speaks of an element of an individual's psyche namely the shadow. The shadow, according to Jung, comprises of the denied aspects of the self.³

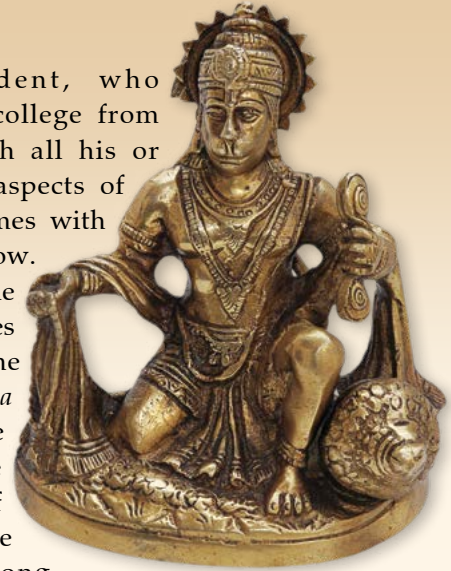
The student, who comes to the college from the school with all his or her repressed aspects of early teens, comes with a lurking shadow.

Unfortunately the student identifies himself with the superficial *persona* that hides the shadow. The sudden burst of freedom in the college life along

with all the temptations, suddenly grabs the shadows from within and along with the shadows pulls down the entire personality into the abyss of destruction.

One can easily find a parallel between this and the episode of the slaying of Simhika by Hanuman in the Ramayana. Simhika, the demoness, who lives deep in the ocean, always captures those who fly over the ocean by grabbing their shadows. She had devoured many before and only Hanuman was destined to overcome her. The ocean represents the vast and the dark realm of the unconscious and from there emerge forces which grab the shadow and pull down the entire personality from accomplishing its life mission.

Same is the case of students who fall prey to temptations leading to addiction. Simhika has caught their shadow. The therapists only see the external factor of drugs and bad influences as the reasons. But in reality the cause may well be the shadow grasper emerging from within the unconscious and bigger than the shadow—which means more repressed the shadows are, easier it is to grasp and destroy. Hanuman interestingly at once made himself small, entered the body of



the shadow-grasper and emerged enlarged destroying her.⁴ One important reason was that he was totally absorbed in the mission of finding Sita, in the service of Lord Rama.

Swami Vivekananda rightly observed to a young devotee who queried Swamiji what ideal one should follow now:

You have now to make the character of Mahavira [Hanuman] your ideal. See how at the command of Ramachandra he crossed the ocean. He had no care for life or death! He was a perfect master of his senses and wonderfully sagacious. You have now to build your life on this great ideal of personal service. Through that, all other ideals will gradually manifest in life.⁵

A youth today may not connect himself with singing *Hanuman Chalisa*, but a psychotherapy based on the way Hanuman overcame the shadow-grabber does provide us with enough scope to develop, what may be called, a Hanuman-therapy for our disturbed youth. This can greatly help them to overcome addictions and destructive tendencies which otherwise feeding on their own shadows destroy their personalities. Hanuman-therapy may involve making the suffering youth let go his false ego-assumptions which in turn make him feel guilty but discover himself or herself as a humble messenger of divinity engaged in a selfless mission. Hanuman-therapy can transform ego-trip into a journey to discover mother Sita. In other words, one should take up the idea of self-discovery, discovering the Sita within, the joy and peace within, to escape the clutches of Simhika.

Vedantic Humanism

Vedantic humanism as propounded by Swami Vivekananda has flowered into a holistic movement of empowering masses without the human tragedies which often accompany any radical movement that have

occurred in last 200 years. Swami Vivekananda forcefully spoke for the suppressed masses of India and thundered in support of their cause which shook the foundations of powers exploiting the masses. At the same time Swami Vivekananda based his radical voice on the firm foundation of a Vedantic humanism. While the political philosophies of socialism which came from the West only spoke economic or political equality imposed on the society by a group of political activists or theorists, Swami Vivekananda spoke of an equality that comes from individual enlightenment through education which enlarges one's vision of the Self. Swami Vivekananda says:

Men must have education. They speak of democracy, of equality of all men, these days. But how will a man know he is equal with all? He must have a strong brain, a clear mind free of nonsensical ideas; he must pierce through the mass of superstitions encrusting his mind to the pure truth that is in his inmost Self. Then he will know that all perfections, all powers are already within himself, that these have not to be given him by others. When he realises this, he becomes free that moment, he achieves equality. He also realises that everyone else is equally as perfect as he and he does not have to exercise any power, physical, mental or moral, over his brother men. He abandons the idea that there was ever any man who was lower than himself. Then he can talk of equality; not until then.⁶

One should remember that even the greatest proponents of socialism from the West during the corresponding period, could not rise above narrow confines of racism. At the most their view of socialism was a patronizing vision of advanced Western civilization guiding the 'less evolved' non-white races and cultures into a socialist utopia.⁷ However in Swami Vivekananda we find a proud call

for the collective heritage of all humanity that transcends all racial barriers:

What! Rise at the expense of another! I didn't come to earth for that! . . . If I am grateful to my white-skinned Aryan ancestor, I am far more so to my yellow-skinned Mongolian ancestor and, most so of all, to the black-skinned Negritoid!⁸

Here we should also emphasize that Swami Vivekananda was also skeptical and highly critical of racial interpretation of Indian social history by British through the Aryan race theory—a stand today vindicated by archeology and genetics.

Hence it is not surprising that from Bagha Jatin to Bhagat Singh, from Malaviya to Mahatma Gandhi, throughout Indian freedom struggle one finds all Indian nationalists embracing the oneness of humanity and never hating the oppressor but only the evil of oppression. Here a skeptical person may ask what if Swami Vivekananda was influenced by Western radicalism and not rooted in traditional Indian culture. To answer this question one just has to see the way the commentary of great humanist Acharya Sri Ramanuja on Bhagavd Gita explains the vision of equality emanating from within as applying to specific human situation. He says:

The self (Atman) which is of the form of knowledge, is alike and uniform, though distinct, in all beings, even though they may externally, and from the point of view of duty, be distinguished as Brahmins, Ksatriyas, householders, celibates, fair, tall etc. The immutable selves in all these perishing forms or bodies are unaffected by the fruits of actions. Such knowledge of the immutability of the self in all changing beings is Sattvika.⁹

Such an application of the equanimity of Atman by Sri Ramanuja created perhaps the first mass movement for the spiritual amelioration of the depressed classes of

people. He accepted peasants and depressed people into his fold. He led the first temple entry movement of Dalits into Vishnu temple at Melkote in Karnataka. He started the Bhakti movement—a mass movement with Vedantic kernel and devotional shell. This Bhakti movement spread to north India and was taken up by Sant Ramananda. This resulted in a lineage of spiritual-social reformers fighting against the stagnation that Indian society had to undergo under the heels of tyrannical and/or exploiting alien rulers.

In the context of Indian culture, one cannot be a 'Facebook radical' or a mere 'Tee shirt radical'. When the message of Vedantic humanism gets internalized then the person becomes a complete radical. He has to fight for justice and human dignity of the fellow human being without any hatred. In Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali (from Kerala) we find such real radicals. It is unfortunate that with such examples of love and benediction around us, the Indian youth have to seek their 'radical role models' elsewhere! Indian youth can easily connect with their humanistic heritage of Vedanta. Social emancipation rooted in Indian radical tradition does not need arms, ammunitions, loss of human life and freedom. It only demands heroes of vision and mission with a heart committed to the good of humanity.

India's Science Tradition

There is a section of youth who reject everything traditional in the name of science and another section that wants to see everything as already present in our culture. What is the relationship of science to Indian culture?

Indian religion has repeatedly positioned itself on realization rather than revelations. Unless one decides to experiment with and

experience the ultimate truth, religion as mere outer shell of beliefs and rituals is useless. From Nachiketa through Buddha to Sri Ramakrishna religion in India has been subject to a rigorous process of experimentation and has been transformed into an experience based phenomenon in India. However the Abrahamic influences during colonialism has made the general educated psyche think of Indian religious tradition as 'another belief system'. Swami Vivekananda stated the Indic position most forcefully applying the method of science to religion. He said:

Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of the opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific—as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry, but will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.¹⁰

Today the religious experiences are getting investigated in neuro-labs throughout the world. Brain scientists like Michael Persinger, Andrew Newberg and V.S. Ramachandran are investigating religious experiences and their neural correlates and are trying to get a complete picture of what may be the biological basis of religion.

Swami Vivekananda showed how a quest for oneness—rooted in Advaitic

philosophy—can provide a strong impetus for the advancement of physical sciences. In his 1896 New York lecture he said:

Take anything before you, the most material thing—take one of the most material sciences, as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology—study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics, in every department of knowledge.¹¹

One remembers that this statement almost like a description of Quantum Mechanics was made almost quarter of a decade before Werner Heisenberg an assistant to Niels Bohr along with Bohr started building the edifice of quantum mechanics.

It should be noted here that some of the greatest achievers of Indian science like Acharya J.C.Bose, and physicist George Sudarshan have strong roots in Indian philosophical tradition and have been inspired by Indian Darshanas. For example, theoretical physicist George Sudarshan shows how the dynamic nature of atoms as revealed by modern science has some interesting parallels to Vaisheshika conceptualization of atoms than the Greek concept of atoms: He says,

The best example is the history of modern physics in this century. To start with the atoms were very substantial objects and one simply wanted to explain the laws of chemistry and certain of the laws of spectroscopy. But it brought about the invention of modern field theory in which objects are in fact complexions of an underlying entity which itself is never perceived. Even where substance predominates, as in the Vaisheshika system, tradition has it that they have to be given potentials and potentialities. Therefore these atoms that the

Vaisesika theorists expounded are more akin to chemical atoms than the sterile Greek atoms.¹²

However does an Indian youth get a rooting in Indian philosophical systems as does his western counterpart? As George Sudarshan himself laments:

The urban educated Indian youth is not aware of the philosophy of Kapila, Gotama, Yajnavalkya nor the science of Kananda. . . Aryabhatta, Bhaskara, Al-Biruni and Amir Khusro are strange names that he sometimes comes across in a scholarly book but their discoveries or worldview has no discernible influence on him.¹³

Such an artificial divorce of educated Indian youth from the native philosophical and spiritual traditions of Indian culture has made Indian youth either shun entire Indian culture as worthless and or fall prey to pseudo-scientific pseudo-spiritual charlatans who peddle 'miracles' as true spirituality.

Swami Ranganathananda (1908-2005), the 13th President of the Ramakrishna Order and an eminent thinker and speaker, has rendered a great service to the youth of this nation by illuminating the need to combine Indian philosophical systems with modern science so that fruitful achievements can be obtained. Today the nation needs thousands of such Swamijis and institutions which have made impressive contribution to scientific study of consciousness by bringing spiritual savants, philosophers and scientists in one platform.

Conclusion

Thus youth—the important section of society which is full of creativity and energy and vital vigour—need to be channelized by the pathways of Indian culture so that India, a nation of great human resources, can contribute as before or even better for the welfare and upliftment of all life in this planet. □



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'Swamiji, how can I best help you?' asked a disciple to Swami Vivekananda. 'Love India!' was his instant answer. —cf. *Life of Swami Vivekananda* By E. & W. Disciples, 2.325

Bhajan—the Tradition of Devotional Singing

A Bhajan is essentially a devotional song sung in temples or puja rooms, individually or collectively. A Bhajan may be a full-fledged composition in praise of a deity such as Rama, Krishna, Ganesha, Durga and so on, or it can be just a few *dohas* (couplets) strung together. Often the last stanza of a Bhajan ends with the name of the composer in a spirit of supplication.

Generally a Bhajan is a type of prayer-song, seeking God's mercy and help, a prayer of strength, purity and other spiritual virtues. Many Bhajans have as their subject stories or episodes from Hindu scriptures, the teachings of saints and descriptions of gods and goddesses. A harmonium, tabla/dholak/mridangam, and tala (two brass circular discs joined by a thread, used for keeping time/rhythm) generally accompany bhajan-singing, though it can also be sung without any accompaniments.

Bhajan-singing has many forms. It may be as simple as the recitation of a mantra or kirtan or as sophisticated as the singing in classical ragas or a kriti. The lyric of a Bhajan may be in Sanskrit or any other Indian language (of late, some Bhajans have been composed in English and other non-Indian languages). There are some regional names for certain compositions such as abhang in Marathi, Dasarpadagalu in Kannada, Guru Bani in Sikh tradition, Swaiyye in Brij tradition (Mathura-Vrindavan) and so on. Whatever be its form or style, a Bhajan is essentially a song expressing love for the Divine.

Some of the Bhajan traditions are Dhrupad, Sufi qawwali and the kirtan or song in the Haridasi tradition. Some of the greatest saints in India have been composers and singers themselves such as Nanak, Kabir, Meera, Purandara Dasa, Andal, Sadasiva Brahmendra, Tyagaraja, Surdas and Tulsidas.

Traditions of bhajan such as Nirguni ('to God without attributes'), Gorakhanathi (followers of Guru Gorakhnath), Madhura-bhakti (bridal-attitude to God) and the traditional South Indian form of Sampradya Bhajan each have their own repertoire and style of singing.

Sampradya Bhajan is based on Kirtanas (songs) and Namavalis (songs composed of names of Hindu gods like Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, etc.) sung in a specific order.

Bhajans are also taught or sung in some schools. In some schools the morning assembly begins by singing a Bhajan.

In modern times, many Bhajans sung in Hindi films too have become part of the popular culture, though classical or traditional way of singing

Bhajans is considered authentic and more satisfying. These days many music albums by popular singers as well as classical singers focus on Bhajan singing. Some of them are quite evocative yet retaining the spirit and poetic structures of a Bhajan. □



Swami Vivekananda: The Bridge between Ancient and Modern Indian Culture

KRISHNARAJ VANAVARAYA

The Present Scenario

We are living in an era of information explosion. Science and technology have revolutionized our thought process. Our understanding, outlook and approach towards life have undergone a sea change. Our life priorities have all changed and humanity as a whole appears to be weak and vulnerable to cope with the pervasive materialist culture. Mere economic advancement might meet man's material needs but will not guarantee a holistic human development which alone can ensure a sustained development leading to lasting peace and harmony.

This kind of conflict can be especially seen in the present youth. They are a confused lot. They find it difficult to strike a balance between personal aspirations and social compulsions. Market reforms have thrown out infinite opportunities to the youth and have at the same time made life miserable—thanks to the fierce competition. How to follow one's choices and yet exercise restraint is the dilemma youth face.

An Ancient Solution

In these changing times, Indian Culture stands like a beacon of light. India's culture is an eternal culture because it is primarily a spiritual culture.

Irrespective of the times, whether ancient or modern, the time tested value systems which served



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as the quintessence of the spiritual content of India has kept our culture intact, when many other cultures and civilizations are there only in their museums. To say that there is a conflict between the ancient times and modern times, is only a myth as far as India is concerned.

Youth, however, need an example where such a balance of ancient and modernity can be seen. What could be a better example than Swami Vivekananda who was a judicious blend of tradition and modernity? Just read his life. Or his remarkably lucid and all-embracing teachings. Or read *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, a wonderful book by Swami Ranganathananda. This four volume book, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is one of the best elucidation of Swami Vivekananda's vision of a society that can take the best of the past and the best of the present to make the future even better. The collective wisdom evolved over the ages finds an irresistible appeal in these pages. It will always be a source of inspiration for the future generations.

India has always welcomed changes. Change is inevitable and is to be welcomed. But the modern day society should have the wisdom to know where to change and where not to change and move forward cautiously towards its rightful destination.

Swami Vivekananda was perhaps the first monk to openly welcome science. But he hastened to add that there has to be a synthesis of science and spirituality, ancient wisdom and modern efficiency.

Swamiji's Message

One of the most nagging problems that youth today face is the pressure to perform well in their examinations. This results in serious emotional and health problems. For them, career is everything and all education

is so oriented only to help a youth get placed in career.

On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda felt that, academic excellence is not the ultimate goal of life; instead, it has to be human excellence. Good education has to sensitize the youth to emerge as an enlightened citizen who would contribute towards the gigantic task of nation-building.

Swami Vivekananda always had a progressive social vision which accepted the hard realities of change and its impact on society. While he was for change, he cautioned against any change that will go to undermine the divinity in man. He urged the modern youth to learn the art of self-control and self-discipline, the only way to manifest their divinity.

What he wanted was man-making. This concept of man-making is easily the most needed orientation to our youth, today. Swamiji felt that, there is infinite potential in every youth and they need to be taught to know it and manifest it to excel in life.

He wanted the modern youth to make use of the Vedic Vision of India to strengthen their moral fabric, acquire the right work culture and go through an internal adjustment to guard themselves against the onslaught of modern material culture. In his inimitable style, Swamiji said,

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship or psychic control, or philosophy, by one, or more or all of these and be free.

Obviously, this restatement of the ancient wisdom makes Swami Vivekananda as the bridge between the ancient and modern times. Rightly did Pandit Nehru remark about Swamiji thus,

Rooted in the past, full of pride in India's prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems, and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present ... Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the modern India of today and I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire that flows through Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda's synthetic vision of combining East and West is the ideal way of empowering the youth to face the challenges of present times. To study Swamiji is to know the core values of Indian culture and heritage as also learn to make them practical in today's world. He is truly the bridge that connects ancient and the modern cultures in a spirit of harmony. □

Swami Vivekananda—An Embodiment of Indian Culture

During his travels, by turns he [Swami Vivekananda] realized, the essence of Buddhism and Jainism, the spirit of Ramananda and Dayananda. He had become a profound student of Tulsidas and Nischaldas. He had learned all about the saints of Maharashtra and the Alvars and Nayanars of Southern India. From the Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya to the poor Bhangi Mehtar disciple of Lalguru he had learnt not only their hopes and ideals, but their memories as well. To his clear vision the Mogul supremacy was but an interregnum in the continuity of Indian national life. Akbar was Hindu in breadth of vision and boldness of synthesis. Was not the Taj, to his mind, a Shakuntala in marble? The songs of Guru Nanak alternated with those of Mirabai and Tansen on his lips. The stories of Prithvi Raj and Delhi jostled against those of Chitore and Pratap Singh, Shiva and Uma, Radha and Krishna, Sita-Ram and Buddha. Each mighty drama lived in a marvellous actuality, when he was the player. His whole heart and soul was the burning epic of the country, touched to an overflow of mystic passion by her very name. He held in his hands all that was fundamental, organic, vital; he knew the secret springs of life. There was a fire in his breast, which entered into him with the comprehension of essential truths, the result of spiritual illumination. His great mind saw a connection where others saw only isolated facts; his mind pierced the soul of things and presented facts in their real order. His was the most universal mind, with a perfect practical culture. What better equipment could one have who was to represent before the Parliament of Religions, India in its entirety-Vedic and Vedantic, Buddhistic and Jain, Shaivic and Vaishnavic and even Mohammedan? Who else could be better fitted for this task than this disciple of one who was in himself a Parliament of Religions in a true sense? —*Life of Swami Vivekananda By E & W Disciples*, 1.392

What Indian Youth Need to Know About Indian Culture

M PRAMOD KUMAR



Indian Youth and Indian Culture

Before answering the question of what Indian youth need to know about Indian culture, it is more pertinent to ask, 'What do Indian youth *know* about Indian culture today?' The typical response to this question would be: 'very little' or 'nothing.'

I might come across as a bit cynical, but having taught Indian Culture to undergraduate students for ten years now, I have learnt to be not just optimistic but more realistic in my assessment of where the Indian

younger generation stands today vis-a-vis Indian Culture. An undergraduate student at a school where I offer course on Indian Culture, shared this new finding about Swami Vivekananda: 'Swami Vivekananda spoke in Tamil at the World Parliament of Religions held in South Africa!' (sic)

The current situation or problem is simply born out of choice. A hundred years ago, Indians did not have to make cultural and lifestyle choices like we do today. Added to this problem of choice, is the handicap of



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ignorance. Today's youth are not making a well-informed choice. It is not that they have examined the pros and cons of the lifestyles they choose or reject, it is simply a herd mentality which they all grow up with. They follow blindly whatever their peers do.

The young Indian is obsessed with the latest trends in globalization. To him what is new is 'cool' and fashionable and all that is old is not even worth trying. Whether it is the latest fashion in clothing, be it a low rise jeans or a trendy jacket, or a major lifestyle choice such as a 'live-in' relationship, the young Indian says newest is the best.

Therefore, it is important that we create a system within the family, in the schools and colleges and in our local societies, which can impart knowledge of the foundations of Indian culture to the youth and engage them in a dialogue to address their doubts. This would go a long way in making them select a wise choice based on a clear understanding of the stakes involved.

Let us examine some 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) about Indian culture with the hope that the resolution provided to these FAQs will help the readers to engage the younger generation in a fruitful dialogue.

Is Indian Culture Outmoded?

All that is old or ancient is not necessarily outdated and all that is new may not be good, even if it is fashionable. In this simple advice lies the key to understanding young India's predicament.

The young Indian wears a peculiar brand of tinted glasses on his eyes. When he looks to the West, he sees only milk and honey. 'Look at how disciplined and civic conscious they are, look at their clean cities and orderly queues,' he says. When he looks at India with his tinted glasses, he sees only dirt and

squalor here. 'Our politicians and bureaucrats are corrupt, the situation is hopeless. India is doomed unless we change and become like the West.'

If the West is truly so progressive and faultless, why is there such seething discontent and turmoil within? This discontent found expression in the 'Occupy' movement recently which is seeking answers to the economic inequality and exploitation created by a world controlled by large corporations which disproportionately benefit a select minority. Just a hundred years of this western economic and technological advance has brought much of the earth's natural resources to the brink of an irreversible collapse.

And is there no corruption or social evil then in Europe or USA today? If so, why is that the leading intellectuals of the West are predicting their own eventual implosion owing to social degeneration. Says one of them:

Taking recent rioting in Greece as my starting point . . . I argue that Western nations are in terminal decline unless they can rediscover the true meaning and value of marriage and of the blessing of children as a gift to married couples and to society in general.¹

Let us listen to the sane voice of Swami Vivekananda who diagnosed this disease of the young Indian long ago and warned us against it:

On one side, new India is saying, 'If we only adopt Western ideas, Western language, Western food, Western dress, and Western manners, we shall be as strong and powerful as the Western nations'; on the other, old India is saying, 'Fools! By imitation, other's ideas never become one's own; nothing, unless earned, is your own. Does the ass in the lion's skin become the lion?' On one side, new India is saying, 'What the Western nations do is surely good, otherwise how did they become so great?' On the other

side, old India is saying, 'The flash of lightning is intensely bright, but only for a moment; look out, boys, it is dazzling your eyes. Beware!'²

This is precisely our condition today and nobody could have put it more poignantly than the patriot monk of India who had great faith in the foundational values of Indian civilization.

Young India must understand that Swami Vivekananda was not being emotional or sentimental in his defence of India. His intellect pierced through the superficialities of external appearances and he had the discrimination to see and differentiate between the ephemeral and eternal. Let us learn from the story of the rise and downfall of many great civilizations and respect the fact that if India has not yet succumbed to a similar fate, then there must be some strength in our culture which has withstood the *agni pariksha* of Time, the all-destroyer.

Can Indian Culture Guarantee 'Success'?

Success for young Indians today is purely a materialistic term. An individual's success is measured by his bank balance. Only those things are valuable to us which have a good market value. Young India, therefore, wants a 'culture' which can guarantee materialistic prosperity. Swami Vivekananda would look down upon us and perhaps say, 'Fine! So be it. Have your fill of materialism before you understand success in a more subtle sense.'

One must remind our young readers that India has been 'successful' for more than a millennium. According to the economic historian Angus Maddison, India had the world's largest economy during the years 1 AD and 1000 AD.³ And India continued to be a major economic power till the British systematically reduced it to one of the poorest nations on earth.

Left to ourselves, our cultural traits have aided us in creating wealth and prosperity for society. Paul Johnson, a columnist for the *Forbes* magazines comments on these remarkable cultural traits which continue to contribute to the success of the Indian Diaspora all over the world:



When left to themselves, Indians always prosper as a community. Take the case of Uganda's Indian population, which was expelled by the horrific dictator Idi Amin and received into the tolerant society of Britain. There are now more

millionaires in this group than in any other recent immigrant community in Britain. They are a striking example of how far hard work, strong family bonds and a devotion to education can carry a people who have been stripped of all their worldly assets.⁴

Swami Vivekananda had more faith in human beings than in all the material wealth of the world:

First of all, try to understand this: Does man make laws, or do laws make man? Does man make money, or does money make man? Does man make name and fame, or name and fame make man? Be a man first, my friend, and you will see how all those things and the rest will follow of themselves after you.⁵

Today the management gurus who are predicting the implosion of Western economies are turning towards the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita and the Artha Shastra. Success is an unfoldment of the inner strength of individual. It is such cultured individuals who make a society successful and not the other way round.

What About India's Social Evils?

Young India wants to clean up all the social ills of Indian society in a jiffy. Generation X and their ancestors in social reform, in their hurry to clean up, have often ended up creating more problems than solving any.

Swamiji was at his humorous best when he sarcastically commented on pseudo-reformers who considered the West as a benchmark in resolving the problems of Indian women. When one such reformer asked him about his views on widow remarriage, Swamiji retorted,

I am asked again and again, what I think of the widow problem and what I think of the woman question. Let me answer once for all—am I a widow that you ask me that nonsense? Am I a

woman that you ask me that question again and again? Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems. O tyrants, attempting to think that you can do anything for any one! Hands off! The Divine will look after all. Who are you to assume that you know everything?⁶

Similarly, during his tour of the US, an American lady made a reference to the British propaganda surrounding the myth of Indian mothers throwing unwanted babies into the Ganga. Swamiji jovially replied, 'Yes Madam! My mother also threw me into the Ganga. But I was so fat that no crocodile could swallow me, and here I am lecturing to you, having crossed the Indian Ocean.'⁷

Swamiji repeatedly cautioned that India should not accept ideas, reforms or social practices coming from the West without critical examination and validation in the light of the foundational values of Indian civilization. He never advocated throwing the baby out with the bath water.

This does not mean that we are asked to go back to the traditional customs of the past. Customs and rituals are but expressions of the culture of Bharatavarsha. Sometimes, the expression may become distorted over a period of time owing to incursions and deviations. But as long as the soul is untouched, the culture lives on and readapts itself to the changing needs of the people. The Bhagavad Gita teaches us that when the body becomes old and diseased, it is discarded like a piece of old, worn out cloth and the soul finds a new body. So it is with customs and social practices.

If some of our customs and practices have become seemingly outmoded, we have the freedom to do away with them, as a gardener would chop off deadwood to prevent

the rot from spreading in order to save the tree. But have we gained the eligibility to sit in judgement over Indian society or to reform its complex mechanisms? Only a person who loves India deeply can gain the authority to change it.

The Core of Indian Culture

So, what is this soul of India which has survived in spite of many ups and downs that we have witnessed over millennia? The core of Indian Culture is the Vedic vision of life. As long as this spiritual worldview is alive and handed down in tact from generation to generation, India will not only survive but thrive in the ages to come with many new expressions of creativity. Swami Vivekananda was never tired of reminding us about the core of Indian Culture in his spirited exhortations:

... As long as this principal function of our life is not disturbed, nothing can destroy our nation. But mark you, if you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.⁸

Will Young India heed the advice of savants like Vivekananda or will it turn away from its heritage and become an imitation of foreign cultures? Swamiji had great faith in the younger generation and hence it does not behove us to be cynical. But, having said that, it is important to reiterate what was said in the beginning of this article—it is imperative and urgent that we create support systems to disseminate knowledge of Indian Culture to the youth.

There is perhaps no better way of spreading awareness of Indian Culture than by making Vivekananda literature accessible to the youth. As we participate in the 150th Jayanti celebrations of Swami Vivekananda, let us all take a resolve to create at least one Vivekananda Study Circle in our local societies to herald a silent transformation of the youth of India.⁹ □



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India's Folk Dance and Music

Indian folk dance and music tradition is a rich tapestry of diverse and numerous hues, thanks to India's vast cultural diversity. Most of the folk music of India is dance-oriented. It is difficult to separate the folk music from folk dance as they often go together. While most of these are connected with a religious event or person or place, some of them are based on season (such as harvest or spring season) or aim at celebrating the birth of a child, a wedding and religious festivals. Performed to express joy, they bring people together.

This dance-music tradition of common folks has many forms and sub-types such as bhangra, lavani, dandiya and Rajasthani. Although the arrival of movies and pop music weakened folk dance and music's popularity, availability of multimedia technology in recent times has greatly revived these traditions.

Most of the folk music-dance is area specific and reflects the geography and local history and beliefs of the people. Here are some of well-known forms of Indian folk dance and music:

Bihu (Assam) is the festival of New Year of Assam falling in mid April. This is a festival of nature and mother earth where the first day is for the cows and buffalos. Second day is for the man. Bihu dances and songs accompanied by traditional drums and wind instruments are essential part of this festival.

Baul music (Bengal) celebrates celestial love expressed in earthy terms. Bauls are singing minstrels and have among them both Hindus and Muslims. They can often be identified by their distinctive clothes and musical instrument. The Baul songs are mainly based on divine love of Krishna or devotion to the Divine Mother.

Bhangra Dance (Punjab) is done with classic style traditional Punjabi dresses, and with instruments including a Dhol, Chimta, Tabla, etc. It was originally performed during the harvest season, but now is a popular form of celebration for any event such as weddings and festivals.

Tippi Dance (Gujarat) comes from the Chorwad region of Saurashtra. In Tippani dance women take a wooden rod to beat the floor, which has iron/wood piece at one end, to make it stronger in opposite rows. It requires much alertness and skill to take part in this dance.





Garba (Gujarat) is sung during Navratri in the honour of Devi Durga, Lord Rama, Krishna, Hanuman and others. It is invariably related to Dandiya dance which is performed during the Navaratri.

Lavani (Maharashtra) comes from the word Lavanya which means beauty. Lavani is an essential part of the Maharashtrian folk dance performances. Traditionally, the songs are sung by female artistes, but male artistes may occasionally sing Lavanis.

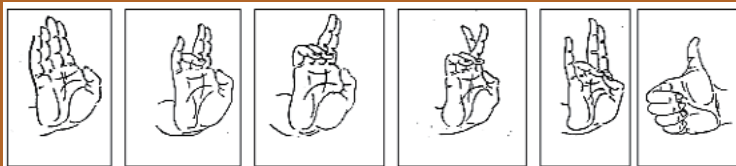
Rajasthani folk music has a diverse cultural collection of music traditions sung by Langas, Saperas, Bhopas, Jogi and Manganiyars. The melody of Rajasthan evokes feeling of serenity and simplicity. It is often accompanied by instruments such as Sarangi, Rawanhattha, Kamayacha, Morsing and Ektara. Percussion instruments come in all shapes and sizes from the huge Nagaras and Dhols to the tiny Damrus.

Pandavani is a folk singing style of musical narration of tales from ancient epic Mahabharata with musical accompaniment and Bhima as hero. This folk art is popular in Chhattisgarh and in the neighbouring tribal areas of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

Naatupura Paatu is Tamil folk music. It consists of Gramathisai (village folk music) and Gana (city folk music).


There are numerous other forms of popular folk music and dance, with varying degrees of differences in style and presentation. □

Mudras: A mudra is a symbolic or ritual gesture widely used in Hinduism and Buddhism. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers. A mudra has a colour, a presiding deity, a rishi, and so many other aspects. There are stories related to the birth of these mudras.



The Sound of Yoga Demystifying the Basics of Yoga

YOGACHARINI MEENAKSHI DEVI BHAVANANI



from the radio, from DVD's, from cinema, from television. One sees the word (dressed up in the English alphabet) everywhere: in advertisements, newspaper columns, book shops, magazines. What in the world does Yoga mean? Can its essence be captured in a word, a sound? Can it be explained? Can it be described? This simple, two syllable Sanskrit word, as old as the hills, has captured the imagination of the world from Timbuktu to the Artic igloo! Is there a magic in the sound itself? Does it somehow strike a deep chord in the human heart and stir up an unnameable longing for an unfathomable experience?

Can 'Yoga' be explained in words! No! It must be 'felt' and 'experienced'. Even Buddhas can only 'point the way'. All explanations can only be 'pointers' in the right direction. The fault, dear seeker, lies not in the stars, but in oneself, who, when the Guru points to the skies, in egotistic myopia sees only the Guru's finger!

The Popular Use of 'Yoga'

The older one grows, the greater the temptation to remain utterly silent, like the serene Dakshinamurthy—sitting still, facing south, with four devoted disciples listening attentively at his feet to his silence. Words have become so cheap, like supermarket stock, flying off the rack, mostly packaged, containing nothing. Talk, talk and again more talk. Shakespeare's elegant phrase describes it well—'All sound and fury, signifying nothing.'

One hears the sound of the word 'Yoga' reverberating from every corner of the globe:

The Real Meaning of Yoga

When Alice complained to the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's classic tale *Alice in Wonderland* that he was not using words correctly, that quaint character replied quite peevishly, 'When I use a word, it means exactly what I choose it to mean, neither more



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nor less'. This captures the state of the word 'Yoga' today. It has come to mean whatever the user chooses it to mean!

We are taught by our Rishis that every sound has an inherent correspondence in Reality (called *sat*). The word cannot be 'used to mean whatever the speaker wishes it to mean'. It must be used in a manner which reflects the essential vibratory meaning of the sound as faithfully as the moon reflects the light of the sun!

The sound of Yoga is silence. Stillness. Did not the great Maharishi Patanjali capture its essence forever in a single, simple phrase: 'Yoga is stilling the whirlpools of the mind'. The Chitta, the mind-stuff, must cease to 'Chatter'. Then Yoga becomes an experience and not a word. The message, clear and simple, has been delivered down through the ages, 'Be still and know that I am God', the Jewish Jehovah told his unruly disciple Moses. The great sages have said, 'Sit still, be quiet. That is all ye know and all ye need to know'.

The essence of Yoga can be summed up in three short phrases: Sit Straight! Be Quiet! Listen! But! These three injunctions are the most difficult things for modern man to do! The human must become a 'being'. The soul must evolve out of the 'doing' stage of the animal nature. Only then can one 'be still and know God'. The animal cannot be consciously still. It is programmed to move for survival's sake! In a sense, 'being still' goes against the very core of the survival instinct—*abhinivesha*, clinging to life! Hence, the difficulty in cultivating stillness and silence.

Why should one sit straight? (Walk straight, talk straight? Think straight? Speak straight?) Why should one be quiet? Physically, emotionally, mentally? Why should one listen? Both to the external sounds as well as internal sounds?

Maharishi Patanjali, the teacher of Yoga, gives the answer, in the very first Sutra of his celebrated *Yoga Sutras: atha yoganushasanam*— 'We now commence the discipline of seeking the essence of ourselves'. Now! Not tomorrow! Not yesterday! Now! The Yogic aspirant seeks to know 'That Which Once Known One Knows All'. *Atha* implies 'now', the present moment. This change, this transformation, this silence must begin now!

The second Sutra of the first chapter (Samadhi Pada) of *Patanjali Yoga Sutra*, of course, is the most well-known:

yogah chitta vritti nirodhaha.

Yoga is the cessation of the whirlpools of the subconscious mind.

The conscious mind, the human mind, can be quiet. But the subconscious mind, the animal mind, the great residue of all experiences of millions of past incarnations, is a boiling cauldron of wild, turbulent, conflicting thoughts, desires, impulses. This sub-consciousness must be brought to consciousness. It must be dealt with and conquered, much as Rishi Agastya drank the ocean to expose the demons hiding in its depths. Once the demons were seen, they could be destroyed. Yoga is the process of 'seeing the demons' and thus, freeing the spirit from their vicious control.

The third Sutra of the first Pada tells what the result of this endeavour will be.

tada drastuh swarupe vastanam

Then the seeker is established in the form of its real Being.

In other words, the *sadhaka* (seeker) becomes what he truly is. One becomes established in one's essential form, which is Atman, Brahman, Shivam, the Purusha—the Great Person, the Oversoul. What are the characteristics of this essential form? *Sat-Chit-*

Ananda. Sat means Reality, or Truth, ('that which is'), *chit* is consciousness, and *ananda* is eternal bliss. What are the means or discipline, sadhana? *Abhyasa*, continued effort, in the now. It is stated in the second Sutra: 'making the subconscious mind quiet.' To know one's true self one must quiet the mind. In these first three Sutras, the whole of the Yoga science is expounded. Begin now, quiet the mind. Then, dwell in and realize your own self, which is the Highest Bliss.

The rest of the 196 Sutras build on this idea. It is said, Yoga is a way of life. That way of life is to conduct oneself moment by moment with conscious discipline and restraint. This will lead to realization of the Goal. Hence, Yoga is 'every moment conscious striving towards higher levels of consciousness'. The Rishis called out in the past and Swami Vivekananda in his booming, charismatic voice shouted at the turn of the twentieth century: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!'

First Step to Yoga

The first step in Yoga is the awakening to consciousness from the deep slumber of animal unconsciousness. (Unfortunately deep slumber is quite pleasant!) Once awakened, one must then arise, and act, as Arjuna acted, to fulfill the Svadhrama, one's own purpose, to which one was born! Most important of all—one must not stop striving, working, till the goal is reached.

Patanjali lays out the eight necessary steps one must take once the awakening has occurred. In eight words, he shows us how to live: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi

First works first. One must not build one's house on shifting sand. An elegant workable system of morality and ethics is laid out by the Rishi. This is the foundation of Sadhana. Without this, Yama and Niyama, there can be no Sadhana. Yama means control, restraining of the animal nature with all its self-seeking, survival, instinctive, behavioral patterns. One must curb all the vicious animal traits. The animal sustains its life through violence. It must kill in order to live.



So Patanjali tells us, the first step one must take to rise out of the animal nature and to begin constructing a truly human nature is to consciously reject all violence—Ahimsa, the Great Vow, which distinguishes man from beast. This is the first Yama, the *mahavrata* (Great Vow), which must be taken if one wishes to walk the Yogic path. It is the conscious decision to step out of the animal realm of the survival instinct, sensory pursuits, competition on all levels, and conditioned reflexes and sub-conscious instincts. It is the threshold of the door passing from sub-conscious Chitta dominated animal life to human existence in the realms of *manas*, consciousness. This is why the ancients proclaimed: *ahimsa paramo dharma*, non-violence is the highest dharma.

The remaining four Yamas follow in its wake. *Satya*, truth or truthfulness is the ability to see the Reality, *sat*, ('That which is') clearly, and to align one's thoughts, words and deeds to that reality. The third step is *Brahmacharya*, the conscious lifting of one's thoughts, words and deeds out of the animal need for self-propagation. This makes one's life sublime by focusing that vital sexual energy into creative living. *Asteya* restrains the animal impulse which instinctively feels 'anything that is not watched or is left unguarded or can be taken by stealth or force belongs to me'. *Aparigraha* is restraining of the animal need to grab, to clasp, to hold, to keep.

Thus the Yamas are a kind of *pratipaksha bhavana*—mental attitudes that are consciously constructed as the direct opposite to bestial animal instincts. As the Yamas take root in the striving soul, the quietude of being, the stillness necessary for transcendence, slowly begins to manifest itself.

The animal restlessness subsides of its own accord as one starts to master the Yamas.

One must then cultivate the strength and will power to hold to these vows, if one wishes to proceed any further on the Yoga path. This may be done step by step in the remaining seven steps of Ashtanga Yoga.

The Second Step is Niyama

The Niyamas are cultivation of consciousness, *manas*, that quality of existence which differentiates man from beast. The Yamas say no to the animal nature. The Niyamas say yes to higher, aware, choice-ful living.

Saucham, the first, is purity, cleanliness, a purity of character from which all animal traits or instincts have been eradicated: physically mentally, emotionally. *Saucham* implies a purity of motivation: one is no longer propelled by sub-conscious like animal instincts: lust for sexual gratification, power, dominance, territorial supremacy or material possession. The motive is purely the desire to evolve towards higher states of being.

Santosham is contentment with what one is, with what one has, with where one exists. It is not dull complacency or laziness or the relaxation-collapse which occurs when desires are satiated. No! It is a deep, profound understanding that every situation in which one finds oneself is exactly what one needs to progress on the spiritual path.

Tapas or *Tapasya* is the fire of discipline which burns out impurities and strengthens the will. *Tapasya* is the power to persist, to push through all obstacles with great cheerfulness. It is the ability to carry on the work when one wishes to give up. It is the ability to face horrendous challenges with skillful hands and a happy heart.

Swadhyaya is constant, every moment self-examination, an awareness that knows down to every nano second, exactly what

one is doing, thinking, saying . . .and... why! 'Man! Know thyself and thou shall know the universe' is what Niyama wants us to do.

Patanjali has saved the best Niyama for last, serving us a 'spiritual dessert'. A spoonful of sugar to make the medicine of the preceding four Niyamas and five Yamas 'go down and become digested'. The fifth Niyama is *Iswara Pranidhana* or submission to the will of God. Islam is based on this Niyama. It says 'Inshallah, 'If Allah wills it'. 'Let It Be!' In fact, Islam means: one who submits to the Great God (Allah). Jesus Christ was a master of this Niyama. Did he not say: 'Not my will, but Thine be done'. The Greek and Roman Stoics, more than 2000 years ago, built their whole philosophy on accepting 'what is' with equal-mindedness.

Now, here is the most peculiar thing about Patanjali's wonderful codification. After presenting us with a rather complex system of rigorous spiritual disciplines, he says of this fifth Niyama: (II: 45)

samadhisiddhi iswarapranidhanat

Samadhi is the fruit of total perfect surrender to Divine Will.

In other words, the goal of Yoga may be obtained if one can perfectly cultivate the attitude of surrender to Divine Will. It is here that Yoga becomes Bhakti. *Iswara Pranidhana* is perfect Bhakti and explains how great souls of all cultures, times and climes attained the Godhead without even hearing the word Yoga—such as the Christian mystics like St. Francis and St. Theresa; the Sufi masters like Rumi; the universalists like Kabir and Shirdi Sai Baba, and the great giants like Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharishi who never performed Pranayama or an Asana in their lives. And yet scaled the heights of exuberant Bhakti and reaped the beatitude of highest bliss-union with the beloved—called

by various names such as Samadhi, Nirvana, Moksha!

If the Yamas and Niyamas are perfected, the mind enters into a deeply still, peaceful state. The *chitta vritti*, the waves of the subconscious mind subside. That peace which passes understanding emerges. One becomes 'established in the state of one's true being'. The goal of Yoga is reached. This is called 'Kriya Yoga', the Yoga of living human life perfectly within the framework of Cosmic Law, codified by Patanjali as the Pancha Yama and Pancha Niyamas, Five Restraints and Five Observances, the first two steps on the path of Ashtanga Yoga. What Patanjali implies is that if one lives a perfect moral and ethical life, one will naturally achieve Moksha, or enter Samadhi.

The Next Six Steps

However, few can reach or sustain that state. Few can perfect Yama and Niyama. The rest of the Sadhakas must go further. They must employ additional tools to construct that perfect silence, that perfect stillness.

The third step then becomes *Asana*. The word *asana* derives from the root *asi* which means 'to be'. Thus Asana means to 'enter into one's true being'. *Sthiram sukham asanam*—'a body position held still and steady with ease is Asana'. Asana is thus cultivation of silence of body.

The fourth step is *Pranayama*, controlling of vital energy by means of breath. The ultimate aim of Pranayama is 'to stop the breath', literally, 'to silence the breath'.

Pratyahara, the fifth step, is transcendence of and silencing of sensual impression, detaching consciousness from sensual stimulus. This is silence of the senses.

By the time the sixth step, *Dharana*, is reached, the body, breath and senses will be

silenced, made quiet and still. Consciousness may then be one-pointed and focused on a single point, a *bindu*. The mind is literally 'tied to one spot, one point'. The quietude, which has been cultivated in the preceding five steps, becomes deeper and more profound as the mind settles into a steady, one pointed



focus. Up to this point, the individual Jiva is utilizing will power (*iccha shakti*); power of

discrimination and knowledge (*jnana shakti*) and the power of action (*kriya shakti*) to cultivate silence and stillness. There is a 'push' towards the goal: a striving, an effort of will.

As that effort bears fruit, in the seventh step (Dhyana) and eighth step (Samadhi) the push turns into a pull and the Jiva is now pulled into the state of Highest Silence and Stillness. After intensive effort in the first six steps—restraint of emotional, animal impulses in Yama; the conscious cultivation of humane virtues in Niyama, control and deep awareness of body in Asana, stilling the body's natural restlessness; slowing, restraining, stopping the breath in Pranayama; shutting down, closing, detaching from sensory stimulus in Pratyahara; Intense focus on one point which is worthy of worship in Dharana, after which there is nothing left 'to do'.

From the seventh step onward, one 'must let go and be'. The 'push' of individual effort becomes 'surrender of the pull to the Lord' from Dhyana onwards. Effort is of no use now. Now, the 'letting go of effort' must occur. This happens through the grace of Guru, past Karma and previous effort. All the work has been done. Now begins 'the waiting, the watching, the silence'. Dhyana is the beginning of the establishment in the state of mystic absorption.

What happens then? It is best to put it in the words of Sri Ramakrishna, 'The salt doll enters into the ocean. Who is left to describe the experience?'

The Great Silence has been entered. When we seek to express it, words suddenly fail us.

In the highest realms, silence alone speaks.

The ultimate sound of Yoga is. . . .That Silence! □



Indian Classical Music

India's classical music tradition has a history spanning millennia and has developed over several eras. It remains fundamental to the lives of Indians today as sources of spiritual inspiration, cultural expression and pure entertainment.

The two main traditions of classical music are Carnatic music, found predominantly in the peninsular regions, and Hindustani music, found in the northern and central regions.

Hindustani music tradition goes back to Vedic times around 1000 BC. It further developed circa the 13th and 14th centuries AD with Persian influences and from existing religious and folk music. The practice of singing based on notes was popular even from the Vedic times where the hymns in Sama Veda were sung as Samagana, and not chanted.

Developing a strong and diverse tradition over several centuries, it has contemporary traditions established primarily in India but also in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Hindustani music was not only influenced by ancient Hindu musical traditions, historical Vedic philosophy and native Indian sounds but also enriched by the Persian performance practices of the Mughals. Classical genres are dhrupad, dhamar, khyal, tarana and sadra. Light classical or semi-classical music include the following genres, among others: thumri, dadra, ghazal, chaiti, kajri, kaththa and tappa.

Carnatic music, on the other hand, is commonly associated with four modern states of south India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Carnatic music is mainly sung through compositions, especially the kriti (or kirtanam)—a form perfected of singing. Purandara Dasa is considered the father of Carnatic music. Sri Tyagaraja, Sri Shyama Shastri and Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar are considered the trinity of Carnatic music. Carnatic music is also usually taught and learnt through compositions.

Both the systems of music have the same basic elements of *shruti* (the relative musical pitch), *swara* (the musical sound of a single note), *ranga* (the mode or melodic formula), and *tala* (the rhythmic cycles). They form the foundation of improvisation and composition in both Carnatic and Hindustani music. □





Aarti—the Act of Waving of Lights

Aarti (or aratrika/arathi) is an essential part of all pujas. Sometimes it is performed independent of a complete puja. It is a simple act wherein a small metal lamp with a handle, with lighted wicks soaked in ghee or camphor, is waved before a deity. Arati is done at temples, in private puja rooms, to sacred rivers like Ganga, and sometimes even to welcome a guest.

The term Aarti also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity, when lamps are being offered.

Aarti ritual can be traced to the Vedic fire rituals, or homa. Though it primarily means waving a lighted oil/ghee lamp, the full ritual of arati includes waving a conch with water, a piece of cloth, a flower and a whisker or hand fan made of peacock feather or some such material. It is symbolic of offering all the five elements of nature (*pancha bhuta*) to God. Lighted lamp represents fire (*agni*). Water-filled conch represents water (*aapa*). The cloth, with its natural pores in its fabric, symbolizes ether (*aakasha*). Flower represents earth (*prithivi*) which has smell as its singular property. Hand fan or a whisker represents air (*vayu*). Thus the whole universe represented by its elementary constituents is offered symbolically to the God by way of His worship. Arati is done to emphasise the glory of God, the All-pervading One. At the end, the worshipper bows down before the deity, symbolizing complete surrender.

Commonly, Arati means waving a metal lamp (silver, brass, bronze or copper) around the form of the deity, generally accompanied by a song and musical instruments. It is waved in a circular and clockwise manner around the deity.

After the Arati, the lamp is placed in a plate, the Arati plate, which is taken around the assembled devotees who slide over their forefingers and palm over the lamp and touch them with their eyes or forehead. It is an act of partaking of the sanctity of the sacred fire. At times, devotees leave their money offerings in the arati plate. The plate may also contain flowers, incense and wet rice grain.

Arati is performed one to five times daily, and usually at the end of a puja or bhajan session. While performing the aarti, the worshipper faces the deity of God (or divine element, e.g. Ganges river or a sacred tree) and concentrates on the form of Divine by looking into the eyes of the deity. It is believed that eyes are the windows to the soul and hence looking them immerses one with the divine being of the deity. Arati marks an auspicious beginning or conclusion of an occasion. □



Yoga-Vedanta Tradition of Meditation

SWAMI NITYASTHANANDA

The Basis of Indian Tradition

Vedanta and Yoga are the two central pillars of Indian spiritual tradition. Vedanta provides the rational metaphysical background to it, whereas Yoga is concerned with methods of realizing Vedantic truths. *Yogavasishtha*, the ancient and highly acclaimed text attributed to Valmiki, outlines a similar idea when it says;

O Rama, there are two methods for the 'destruction of the mind'—Yoga and Jnana. Yoga is the stopping of the movements of the mind, and Jnana is perceiving rightly.

Here Jnana is related to the Upanishadic inquiry into the Ultimate Reality, and Yoga is the practical method of realizing that Reality. Both are necessary—one illumines the path, and another takes us along the path. Jnana without yoga is lame, and yoga without Jnana is blind.

The Rise and Fall of Thought-waves

The most essential aspects of Yoga are concentration and meditation. They take the aspirant step by step to the highest state of concentration called Samadhi where all the mental modifications are stopped and the inner Self is revealed. Swami Vivekananda explains this with an illustration:

The bottom of the lake we cannot see, because its surface is covered with ripples. It is only possible to catch a glimpse of the bottom, when the ripples have subsided, and the water is calm. If the water is muddy or is agitated all the time,

the bottom will not be seen. If it is clear, and there are no waves, we shall see the bottom. The bottom of the lake is our own true Self; the lake is the chitta and waves, the vrittis.¹

The *vrittis* are the thought-waves arising in the mind. The waves, as we know, always rise, and fall. Similarly, the same vritti or wave does not remain steady in the mind more than a moment. Thoughts of various kinds—sometimes related and many times unrelated, sometimes neutral or emotionally charged—invade the mind like waves. They, as if, blast the fort of discrimination (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairagya*), overwhelm our self-consciousness, and kidnap or hijack us to a state of being—without even our knowledge. That is why, most of the time we remain in a state of self-forgetfulness or semi-consciousness. Unless we make a sincere attempt to meditate, we will not know how much we are slaves to our thoughts and how much self-forgetful we are. This is true of all, irrespective of the social status or group we may belong to.

We live in a dynamic world, where every particle is in constant flux. We cannot imagine a state where there is no action or movement. Even the apparent state of inaction reveals intense activity when analysed deeply. Still, there is an urge in man to be calm and silent without any activity, which induces him to go into the state of deep sleep everyday. Meditation is an attempt to reach that state

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consciously, gradually reducing the number of thoughts and finally retaining only one thought in the mind.

Arjuna's confession in the Gita that controlling the mind is as difficult as controlling the wind is no exaggeration. Nor can one avoid this task. One has to face inner dilemmas and difficulties in this stupendous task of overcoming the mind. But no great things are achieved without difficulties. Some thoughts are devastating like cyclone, tumbling down our towers of hopes, and sometime thoughts WWcome as whirlwind of complexes sucking all our mental and nervous energy, leaving us completely exhausted. Some thoughts of minor importance stealthily creep in—taking advantage of our carelessness—and slowly overpower us. This brings in a hoard of other thoughts, and we are swept awWay by the current. Such is the state of our mind!

Though this imagery may unnerve many and discourage some to undertake the practice of meditation, still the very attempt to meditate gives us the knowledge of the dynamics of the mind. In the process we make great strides in self-mastery or self-awareness and develop a spirit of detachment. With the help of meditation, one can remain in subjective consciousness as a witness, keeping away distractive thoughts. We then feel our true existence, separate from the psycho-physical entity. At this stage the Buddhi or will-power becomes free from the shackles of desires and begins to derive light and inspiration from this divine subjective-consciousness. Thus strengthened, the Buddhi begins to gain control over all other aspects of our personality. Meditation is a process of extricating individual consciousness from the tangles of mental modifications of different types such as cognitive, affective and volitional, both positive and negative nature,

and feeling oneself separate from the psycho-physical entity. It is knowing the Self as It is.

Two Kinds of Concentration

Meditation is a special kind of concentration. In ordinary concentration, the mind is focused on one particular subject, and there can be many divergent thoughts related to that particular subject. Here the subject may be one but thoughts are many and dissimilar. For example, if one is reading a book on electricity and if his mind is concentrated, all his thoughts would centre on electricity alone. But in meditation there is one subject and one thought related to that. Regarding this special kind of concentration, says Swami Yatiswarananda (1889-1966), an eminent monk of the Ramakrishna Order:

It is important to know the difference between ordinary concentration and meditation. By the word 'meditation' we mean Dhyana or contemplation. It is not just ordinary concentration. It is a special type of concentration. In the first place, meditation is a fully conscious process, an exercise of the will. Secondly, meditation means concentration on a spiritual idea which presupposes that the aspirant is capable of rising above worldly ideas. And finally, meditation is done usually at a particular centre of consciousness. It is clear that true meditation is a fairly advanced state, attained after long practice. It is the result of long years of discipline.²

This means that if one is meditating on the divine form of Rama at a particular centre of consciousness, the heart, for instance, then there would be a continuous flow of the same thought representing the divine form of Rama, to the exclusion of all other thoughts—even the thoughts related to Rama's qualities or his life. This continuous flow of one and the same thought is called meditation.

Normally there is a continuous flow of thoughts in our minds related to different objects, events and persons. If one thought represents one particular object, the subsequent one would be related to some other object or person. This state of mind is called *sarvarthata* in Yoga literature. In contrast to this, the flow of similar thoughts pertaining to a chosen object of meditation is called *ekagrata* or onepointedness.

This is a higher form of concentration having different but similar thoughts representing one and the same object. As a result of quick succession of these thoughts, the object of meditation appears to be steady and, as the concentration deepens, the object becomes more vivid and bright. This is somewhat similar to the case when still pictures are taken and projected on the screen: the form on the screen appears to be one and steady though the images are different. This meditative state is described as *taila dharavat*, 'like a stream of oil'. When we pour oil from one vessel to another, there is constant flow of oil without any sound or splash. But when we pour water in similar fashion there is so much of noise and splash. If the thought-current flows towards the object of meditation in an uninterrupted stream, without any restlessness, that state is called meditation. According to Patanjali, *tatra pratyayaikatanata dhyanam*—'an unbroken flow of thoughts of that object (of meditation) is called Dhyana.'

This is similar to *upasana* spoken of in Vedanta. Adi Shankaracharya gives a vivid description of *upasana* in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. He says,

Upasana, or meditation, means approaching an object of meditation as presented by the scriptures, making it an object of one's own thought, and dwelling on it uninterruptedly for long by continuing the same current of thought

with regard to it— like a stream of oil poured from one vessel to another.³

Preliminary Stages

This state is reached only after one has passed through two other stages of meditation—*pratyahara* and *dharana*.

Pratyahara means making the mind free from the clutches of senses. The mind is always running after sense objects. When we see a particular object or hear a particular sound, the mind immediately grabs it and starts building a castle of thoughts around it. Same is the case when a particular thought arises in the mind. When we sit for meditation, at first the mind goes towards the objects of senses. We then withdraw the mind from these and try to fix it on the object of meditation. This withdrawal of the mind is called *pratyahara*.

Even after withdrawal, however, the mind refuses to remain steady and again starts wandering in the world of the senses. We repeatedly try to withdraw it from this wandering towards senses, and this struggle goes on for a long time, after which the mind becomes steadier and we are able to fix it on the object of meditation. This stage is called *dharana* ('held' or 'fixed').

What to Meditate on?

The object of meditation can be the divine form of our chosen deity, or some sound like the Pranava (Om), or a particular centre of consciousness like the heart region (i.e., the centre of chest, and not the physical heart) and so on. When the mind remains fixed on the object for a definite length of time, without being disturbed by any other thought, and the object of meditation becomes steady and vivid, then the mind is said to be in the state of meditation.

One can also meditate on the awareness of 'I'. When we separate ourselves from the thoughts, and when we observe them as external objects are observed, then we feel our existence as individual consciousness, or I-consciousness, separate from all other things. We can meditate on this I-sense, and then there will be a series of *aham-vritti* ['I-thought'] in the mind. Even if other thoughts come, they just peep in and disappear. When I-consciousness occupies the mind-space, other thoughts cannot play havoc in the mind. In villages people keep certain type of eatables for drying in the sun, and often a child is asked to keep a watch, lest the birds would pick them up. The moment the child's attention is diverted, birds suddenly descend from nowhere and pick the food and fly away. Like birds, our thoughts will have their way whenever we lose self-awareness, and we would be carried away by the current of thoughts, and would not be aware of 'where I am'. If the lamp of awareness is kept burning in the heart-chamber, then the thieves of thoughts cannot enter it.

Being Alert

The state of meditation is, in fact, a state of great alertness. The meditator must be very alert and not allow the thoughts other than that of the object of meditation. He must be able to detect the other thoughts intruding into the inner chamber of this mind housing the object of his meditation. The moment we forget ourselves, lose our consciousness, distracting thoughts will rush in and take us away from the object of our meditation—rather they kidnap us blind-folded. In the famed temple of Lord Tirupati, the priests do not allow anybody to stand before the deity more than a second or two, much against our wishes to stand there for sometime and offer our prayers. They immediately push us away.

In the same way, one should not allow any thought to stay before the adorable object of our meditation. In fact, the state of meditation is more wakeful than the wakeful state itself. Swami Yatiswarananda says,

If we are wide awake and follow spiritual life with dedication, we can detect every movement of the mind, observe every modification of the mind.

Sri Ramakrishna explains this one-pointedness with an example. He says that while threading a needle, even if one small strand of the thread is out of direction, the thread will not pass through the eye of the needle. Similarly a distracted mind cannot be focused on God; there should be no distracting thought. As the mind becomes concentrated during meditation, the object of meditation becomes more vivid, luminous and lively, just as the reflection of full moon in the water becomes clear and vivid as the ripples of the water subside. In that state the aspirant experiences pure joy within. This is the true 'taste' of meditation.

Need for Inner and Outer Disciplines

The meditative life requires discipline at different levels.

Need for a Routine: First of all one must observe moderation in food, recreation, work and rest. The Gita (6. 16-17) says,

The success in yoga is not for him who sleeps too much or too little. To him who is temperate in eating and recreation, in his effort for work, and in sleep and wakefulness, yoga becomes the destroyer of misery.

Those who want to take meditative life seriously must follow definite routine and stick to it at all costs. Says Swami Yatiswarananda,

This is the only way to discipline the wayward will. We should plan our waking hours—how to discharge our daily duties, what to do with the

spare time, what thoughts we should have, etc. The life of spiritual aspirant must be conscious and alert. Minimize your unconscious thinking and activities. Be more and more wide awake.⁴

Moral Integrity: Apart from these physical disciplines, moral discipline is also indispensable. Swamiji says,

Why should a man be moral and pure? Because this strengthens his will. Everything that strengthens the will by revealing the real nature is moral. Everything that does the reverse is immoral.⁵

If a man loses moral sensitivity, he will be subjugated by worldly temptations, and will try to fulfil his desires unscrupulously without guilt. Naturally in such a condition man's mind becomes so restless that no meditation would be possible for him. Rather it is better for him not to attempt meditation. Now-a-days, many people practice certain techniques of meditation for the reduction of stress and tension. This they do without sufficient moral integrity. Hence their purpose is to carry out their worldly pursuits more efficiently! However, such practices have no spiritual value.

Harmony In Interpersonal Relationships: Another important prerequisite for a fulfilling contemplative life is good and harmonious human relationships, without which it is difficult to maintain emotional balance. If one is constantly at variance with the people surrounding him, his mind naturally remains agitated and this is obviously not conducive for contemplative life. Then, what must be our attitude towards various types of people we come across in our work-a-day life?

Patanjali talks of four virtues to be cultivated with regard to four kinds of people:

The mind remains serene by the cultivation of feelings of amity, compassion, goodwill and

indifference respectively towards virtuous, miserable, happy and sinful.⁶

One must be friendly with the good, which will help one in developing and manifesting one's own goodness. One must develop the capacity to feel for the suffering people, and try to help them; in his own capacity. If no other help is possible, one should pray for their well-being. This will help one to come out of the narrow limits of self-centredness, and make one kind and benevolent. This mental flexibility is favourable for meditative life. Another important virtue is to feel happy seeing others happy. We generally are interested in our own happiness and strive for it. This kind of pursuit of happiness itself is a hindrance to the expression of inner joy. When we stop this and live a natural life, others' happiness will make us joyful. This joyful attitude is absolutely necessary for effective contemplative life. And lastly, one must be indifferent towards bad people and bad thoughts within us, without getting upset. This is the attitude of indifference which Patanjali speaks of.

Progress in Meditation

Swami Brahmananda, a great direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says,



Meditation in the primary stage is like waging a war with the mind. With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord. But in the beginning, take care that you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly, then gradually intensify your effort. Through regular practice, the mind will become steady and meditation will be easier. You will no longer feel any strain even while sitting for long hours in contemplation.⁷

There are, however, certain signs of progress in practice of meditation.

First, the number of thoughts during the meditation will slowly get reduced. In the beginning, we get plenty of thoughts, good and bad, when we sit for meditation. But as we advance in our practice, the number of thought gets reduced.

Second, our mind's wandering will be greatly curbed. Even whatever thoughts we get when we meditate, they will not take us away from the object of meditation. We will have some control over them, and the thread of inner awareness would keep them under check.

Third, the mind will dwell on the object of meditation for a longer time.

Fourth, self-awareness will be intensified, and this will check wanderings of the mind.

Lastly, we will derive deep peace and joy in doing meditation and we will not try to avoid practice on some pretext.

Conclusion

Swami Adbhutananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, gives a beautiful description of what is meditation in advanced stages:

There are you and your chosen Deity and none else—that is meditation. When the probationer's meditation comes to this stage then he may be said to have control over his mind; then the fickleness of the mind loses its power over his mind. Before the mind tries to think of anything other than the object of meditation the probationer comes to know of it and prevents it from doing that. All the workings and tendencies of the mind are revealed to him before they could assume any power to distract him from the contemplation of the Chosen Deity. Attachments or attractions to objects of enjoyment, aversion to desirable spiritual things, annoyance towards practices that may lead to spiritual enlightenment, etc., melt away before taking any form. All evil tendencies, such as doing harm to anyone, telling lies, disappear before producing any changes in the body. His nature is transformed. His body is transfigured. His eyes, face, his movements, his words— all indicate his meditative nature. A truly meditative man has different looks, different gaits, different respiration. During meditation his respiration stops, a calmness pervades his personality; he loses consciousness of his body.⁸

This summarises the ideal of Yoga-Vedanta tradition of meditation. □



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Classical Indian Dance



Bronze image of Nataraja

India has a rich heritage of classical dance forms. Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's national academy for performing arts, confers classical status on eight Indian classical dance styles: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, Odissi and Sattriya.

In Hindu mythology, dance is believed to have been conceived by Brahma, the Creator. Brahma inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the *Natya Shastra*, a treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. Bharata Muni used *pathya* (words) from the Rigveda, *abhinaya* (gestures) from the Yajurveda, *geeta* (music) from the Samaveda and *rasa* (emotions) from the Atharvaveda to form the *Natyaveda* (body of knowledge about dance).



Kathakali

In ancient India, dancers usually performed in temples, on festive occasions and seasonal harvests. Dance was regularly performed before deities as a form of worship.

Brief descriptions of the classical Indian dance:

Bharatanatyam, dating back to 1000 BCE, is usually accompanied by classical Carnatic music and is popular in Tamilnadu. Its inspirations come from the sculptures of the ancient temple of Chidambaram.

Kathakali (*katha*, 'story'; *kali*, 'performance') is a classical dance-drama from Kerala. This dance is particularly known for dancer's elaborate costume, towering head gear, billowing skirts, and long silver nails.



Manipuri

Kathak, originating from Uttar Pradesh, traces its origins to the nomadic bards of ancient northern India, known as Kathaks, or storytellers. Its form contains traces of temple and ritual dances, and the influence of the bhakti movement. It also absorbed certain features of Persian dance imported by the royal courts of the Mughal era.

Odissi is well-known by the importance it places upon the Tribhangi ('three parts break'), the independent movement of head, chest and pelvis and upon the basic square stance known as Chauka or Chouka that symbolizes Lord Jagannath.

Kuchipudi, from Andhra Pradesh, is accompanied by songs set in Carnatic music. The singer is accompanied by mridangam, violin, flute and the tambura. Ornaments worn by the artists are made of a light weight wood called Boorugu.

Manipuri, from Manipur, highlights the love between Radha and Krishna. It incorporates the characteristic cymbals (kartal or manjira) and double-headed drum (pung or Manipuri mridang) of sankirtan into the visual performance.

Mohiniyattam, from Kerala, is generally performed as solo recitals by women. Mohini-yattam comes from the 'Mohini', an enchantress, and 'aattam' graceful and rich body movements. Mohiniyattam is thus 'dance of the enchantress'. Mohini refers to the form Lord Vishnu took in the Hindu mythology. Mohiniyattam was popularized by Swathi Thirunal, the Maharaja of the state of Travancore (Kerala), and Vadivelu, one of the Thanjavur Quartet.




Bharatanatyam



Traditional dance—stone carvings from Chennakeshava temple, Belur, Karnataka

Sattriya, from Assam, was introduced by the great saint Sankardeva, in 15th century. At first Sattriya consisted of Ankiya Naat (a form of one-act plays), performed in the sattras, as Assam's monasteries are called. As the tradition developed and grew within the sattras, the dance form came to be called Sattriya Nritya. □





Sat Chit Ananda The Philosophy of the Upanishads

SWAMI SARVAPRIYANANDA

The Vedas are the core scriptures of Hinduism and the Upanishads are texts which form the philosophical essence of the Vedas. The Upanishads are collectively called the Vedanta. The Vedantic world-view permeates all aspects of Indian culture and way of thinking.

Literally, Vedanta means 'end of the Vedas' and indeed, many of these texts are found at the end of each of the four Vedas. The Upanishads are also the end or culmination of the Vedas in the sense that they embody the highest philosophical knowledge of the Vedas. 'The essence of the knowledge of the Vedas was called by the name of Vedanta, which comprises the Upanishads.'¹

We hear of 108 Upanishads, ten of which are especially important because they were selected for commentary by Adi Shankaracharya. There is a traditional shloka which lists these major Upanishads:

*'Isha-Kena-Katha-Prashna Munda-Mandukya Tittirih
Aitereyam cha Chhandogyam Brhadaryankam tatha'*

Often these Upanishads are in the form of dialogues between sages and truth-seekers. For example in the Mundaka Upanishad, the enquirer, Shaunaka asks the sage Angiras, 'Sir, what is that, which becoming known, everything here becomes known?' In the Katha Upanishad, a little boy, Nachiketa asks about what, if anything, survives death—and he asks this to none other than Yama, Lord of Death!

Let us go straight into the heart of the Upanishads. What is their central message to us?



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You Are Pure Existence

In the sixth chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad, we find a dialogue between a sage and his son, Shvetaketu. The enquiry here is, 'What is that knowledge by which everything becomes known?' And to grasp the answer to this bold question, we must appreciate the concept that by knowing the cause one can know the effects. Thus if you know clay, you know all pots made of clay (you know that all such pots are nothing but clay), by knowing iron one understands all implements made of iron, by knowing gold, all gold ornaments are understood as nothing but gold and so on.

In the same way, if we enquire deeply enough, the Upanishad claims, we shall see that all existent things are nothing but existence itself or pure existence. *Sat* is the term used for pure existence.

To explain further, take the traditional example of a pot—the pot is nothing but its cause, clay; clay is nothing but its cause *prithvi* or the earth element, *prithvi* is nothing but its cause *ap* or the water element, and in this way we trace everything back to the primeval cause, pure existence or *Sat*. It is *Sat* appearing as this world through the mysterious agency of *maya*.

And 'Thou, O Shvetaketu,' says the sage, 'art That!' By 'That' of course, he means, *Sat*, pure existence. You, your mind and body, and indeed, everything you see around you, are essentially nothing but pure existence, appearing in multifarious forms, courtesy of *maya*. Ignorance means being unaware of

your *Sat* nature, and consequently being identified with the body-mind complex with all its attendant problems and

sufferings. Enlightenment is just the reverse—being aware of yourself as *Sat* and being free of the body, mind and all *samsara*. You are the immortal, unchanging *Sat* and the world is a mere shadow, the projection of *maya*, passing over you. This does not actually destroy the body or the world—rather you begin to see things as they really are.

Your true Self, *Sat*, is not a thing, an object, among other objects of the universe. Rather It is the very existence of all things and they are not apart from It. To a *jnani*, each object reveals *Sat*.

You are Pure Consciousness

In the Kena Upanishad, we find a very interesting question. We see, hear, speak and think—but what power impels our mind to think, our tongue to speak, our eyes to see and ears to hear? In other words, what are we in the deepest, most profound depths of our being? Like most deep questions, it appears deceptively simple.

Consider our bodies. They are made of matter. Yet, we have a first-person experience in our bodies. There is something like experiencing the redness of a rose or 'being myself'. In modern philosophy, these are called *qualia*. Modern neuroscience is unable to account for the vivid living conscious experiences which we have all the time. This vivid first person experience cannot be captured by a materialistic account like the firing of neurons. This is the so-called 'hard problem' of modern consciousness studies.

The Kena Upanishad begins with this question about consciousness—the inner experience of thinking, hearing, seeing, speaking. What is that shining within us which enables all these conscious experiences and functions? Who is that Being or what is that mechanism which makes these possible?



The Guru's answer is extraordinary and profound (and, at first, rather enigmatic). 'It is the Ear of the ear, Mind of the mind, Eye of the eye ...!' Let us try to understand this. The answer, simply put, is pure consciousness—*Chit*. The moment we use a term like consciousness, we have to be very careful because the immediate temptation is to understand it in the sense of thoughts and feelings. This is how consciousness is usually understood by modern psychology. But when the Upanishads speak of pure consciousness we must carefully distinguish it from the ordinary understanding of consciousness.

Science says consciousness is a product of the body (the brain to be specific). But the Upanishads hold that *Chit* or consciousness is not a product of the body or even the mind. Our bodies are made of matter and our minds too are made of matter, albeit of a subtle kind, while *Chit* is radically different from matter. *Chit* pervades and illumines the mind and body enabling all functions—thinking, seeing, hearing, feeling, speaking and so on. *Chit* is 'known' only through its manifestations in the various functions of the mind, organs and body. Without the body and mind, as in deep sleep, *Chit* cannot be known or experienced—yet, It continues to exist.

Now we are in a position to understand the Guru's enigmatic reply: 'Since It is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of eye, therefore (realizing It) the jnanis transcend the world and become immortal.' Since *Chit* enables each organ to perform its specific function, it is appropriate to call It the essence of all organs—Ear of the ear, Mind of the mind, etc.

Chit is what you really are—pure consciousness. It is unchanging and undying and if you realize yourself as *Chit*, you become

immortal (rather, you realize that you are immortal and always were). *Chit* identified with body and mind appears to be mortal. Note that the bodies are mortal—equally for the jnani and ajnani. Ramakrishna, Christ and Buddha—all had physical bodies and those bodies are gone, just as our bodies will perish one day. But as *Chit* we are immortal. This is to be realized and this is the Upanishadic ideal of *moksha* or freedom.

Our true Self, *Chit*, is not an experience, yet all experiences shine in *Chit*. *Chit* is the consciousness illumining every thought, every experience. To the jnani, *Chit* is experienced in each experience.

We Are Pure Bliss

In the final analysis, what we all want is happiness. What is happiness? And more importantly, how can we be truly happy? The search after happiness forms the field of enquiry in a remarkable section of the Taittiriya Upanishad. What exactly is studied about happiness? The answer is: whether happiness is born of sense contacts between subject and object (as is usually understood) or whether happiness is the very nature of the Self. The Upanishad starts by looking at sense enjoyments as the source of happiness.

If we want to study happiness scientifically, it would be helpful to actually measure happiness and for this we need a unit of happiness. The Upanishad proceeds to construct a model of maximum human happiness. Imagine a young man, physically strong, bursting with vitality and energy. He is highly educated and morally upright. Old age, physical weakness, ignorance and moral corruption—all causes of misery—are ruled out. Poverty, of course, is one of the greatest barriers to the fulfillment of desires and so the Upanishad endows this fortunate young

man with plenty of cash—all the wealth of the world, in fact. Now imagine the happiness of this person—young, vital, energetic, noble, very highly educated and extremely wealthy. This is the unit of human happiness: '*ekah manusha ananda*'.

Is it possible to get even greater happiness? Yes, but not in this human existence. For this earthly existence, these material objects of enjoyment and the very human frame itself, all have their limitations. Beyond this familiar plane of existence there are superior worlds, finer objects of enjoyment and powerful bodies designed for greater enjoyment. Such is the *manushya-gandharva-loka* where happiness is one hundred times the maximum happiness possible in a human body! Even this is by no means the end. The Upanishad speaks of an ascending ladder of *lokas*, or worlds, of truly cosmic proportions. As one ascends to these higher heavens, happiness is multiplied by a hundred times at each level. In the highest heavens, happiness is millions and billions of times greater than the maximum of human happiness!

How does one reach these *lokas*? By the merit earned through the religious rituals prescribed in the Vedas. Of course, one has to wait till death to travel to these higher *lokas*.

Then comes the real point of this analysis. The Upanishad says that all happiness is only a reflection of the happiness of the Self, *atmananda*. The bliss of the Self is reflected in the serene mind and experienced as happiness. Man, in his ignorance, feels that happiness is due to the enjoyment of a variety of sense objects and spends all his life trying to get happiness out of sense enjoyment. If one can actually make the mind calm enough, it will be filled with happiness—without need of external objects. What a great discovery—finding the joy within!

How can we make the mind calm? By renunciation of desire, says the Upanishad. One who has the deepest conviction of the Vedantic truth—that one's own Self is of the very nature of bliss—and does not hanker after sense pleasures, will get a hundred times the maximum human happiness in this very life, right now! He doesn't have to earn merit and wait for death to go to the higher heavens. Whatever happiness the worldly man gets out of sense enjoyments here and hereafter, the all renouncing sage of the Upanishad gets here and now, by the very virtue of his renunciation.

Finally the Upanishad makes a startling statement. The very pinnacle of happiness, billions of times greater than the unit human happiness, available in the highest heaven to the man of extraordinary merit, or here and now to the all-renouncing sage—that ultimate happiness of *Brahmaloka*, the 'world' of Highest Brahman, and the unit happiness in man of *manushyaloka*, are virtually one and the same! It is the Self, which is reflected as varying degrees of happiness in man and in the highest *deva*. The difference is in the reflecting medium, not in the Self.

Just as you can see the reflection of your face in different mirrors and the quality of the mirrors determines the quality of the reflection. Yet in all mirrors, fine or poor, it is the very same face being reflected. Just as these varied reflections do not affect your face, the Self is not affected by the variations in happiness in all these mediums, human and celestial. Indeed, just as you would not be particularly interested in seeing your reflection in a mirror all the time, an enlightened soul wouldn't care to experience various degrees of happiness in various bodies. Upon realization, the difference of subject and object disappears and all is known to be Bliss Itself—*ananda*

swarupa, the quintessence of bliss. This is the *Ananda Mimamsa*—an enquiry into bliss, described in the Taaittiriya Upanishad.

In fact, all worldly happiness is a particle of the ocean of your own *ananda swarupa*, your true Self. To the jnani, all experiences, apparently pleasant or unpleasant, reflect Bliss.

You are Sat Chit Ananda

So we see how the ultimate reality expounded in the Upanishads, Brahman, is Pure Existence–Consciousness–Bliss, *Sat Chit Ananda*. Existence, consciousness, and bliss are not qualities or properties of Brahman. It is not that Brahman exists, but that It is existence itself. Not that Brahman is a conscious entity, rather It is consciousness itself. And not that Brahman is happy, It is bliss itself. It is the source of all happiness.

All the Upanishads consistently proclaim that you are one with Brahman, that you are verily *Sat Chit Ananda*. And everything else, all other living beings, the whole universe is Brahman. All beings are in you, and you are in all beings—the real you, of course.

This is to be made a living realization. ‘The one central idea throughout all the Upanishads is that of realization.’² The way to realization consists of *Shravanam*, (lit. ‘hearing’) meaning repeated and systematic study of the Upanishads, *Mananam*, clarifying all doubts with rigorous logical reasoning and *Nididhyasanam*, assimilating the Upanishadic truth by meditation.

The result is freedom—ultimate and permanent. ‘Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watch words of the Upanishads.’³ □



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An Eternal Prayer

असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ॥

From untruth lead me to Truth. From darkness (of ignorance) lead me to light (of knowledge). From death lead me to immortality.

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

From the unreal, lead us to the Real.
From darkness, lead us unto Light.
From death, lead us to Immortality.
Reach us through and through our self.
And evermore protect us, O Thou Terrible!,
From ignorance, by Thy sweet Compassionate Face.

—Swami Vivekananda

Chanting of Mantras—Invoking the Presence of Divine

In many temples and homes in India, especially in south India, one hears Sanskrit verses being chanted in a certain structured way, in a melodious cadence of rising and falling sound. This type of chanting is called Veda Patha.



In the Vedic tradition, Primal Sound is referred to as Shabda Brahman or 'Word as the Absolute'. Maitri Upanishad (VI.22) states: 'He who is well versed in the Word-Brahman, attains to the Supreme Brahman.' A good portion of the Vedantic literature elucidates the use of sound as a spiritual tool. They assert that the entire cosmic creation began with sound.

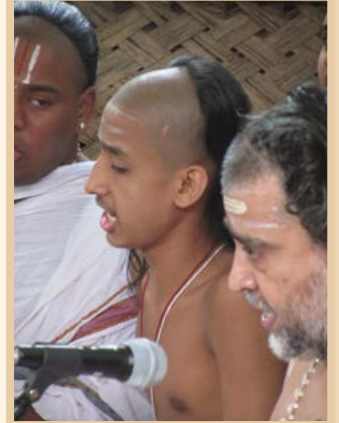
Mantras, or sacred sounds, are used to pierce through sensual, mental and intellectual levels of existence (all lower strata of consciousness) in order to purify the mind and attain spiritual enlightenment. Vedanta-sutra (4.22) declares, 'By sound vibration one becomes liberated.'

There are two ways of reciting the mantra-literature. One is called Veda Patha or Vedic chanting (with several well organized sub-sections) and Parayana or ritual or daily recitation of a hymn or mantra. Some of the popular Vedic hymns are Shanti Patha, Purusha Suktam, Narayana Suktam, Durga Suktam, Sri Rudra Prashna and others.

Veda Patha or Vedic chanting consists of several pathas, 'recitations' or ways of chanting the Vedic mantras. This is considered the oldest unbroken oral tradition in existence. In 2003, UNESCO proclaimed the tradition of Vedic chant a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

The various pathas or recitation styles are designed to allow the complete and perfect memorization of the text and its pronunciation, including the Vedic pitch accent. The students are first taught to memorize the Vedas using simpler methods like continuous recitation (*samhita patha*), word-by-word recitation (*pada patha*) in which compounds (*sandhi*) are dissolved and *krama patha* (words are arranged in the pattern of ab bc cd...); before teaching them the eight complex recitation styles.

The other tradition of mantra-chanting is called parayana. It is a ritual chanting of hymns like Aditya Hridayam, Vishnu-sahasranama, Lalitha-sahasranama, and other hymns in praise of other gods and goddesses. One of the most popular parayana books is *Durga Saptashati* (also called *Chandi* or *Devi Mahatmyam*), describing the glory of Divine Mother in 700 verses. It is widely read by millions of devotees all over India. □





Bhakti in Indian Culture

SWAMI LAKSHMIDHARANANDA

The Flow of Bhakti

'As oil poured from one vessel to another falls in an unbroken line, so, when the mind in an unbroken stream thinks of the Lord, we have what is called Para-Bhakti or supreme love,' says the *Devi Bhagavatam*.

The nectar of Bhakti or devotion not only flowed from the devotee towards the Lord, but also flowed into the hearts of millions of Indians down the centuries. Right from the seed of Bhakti in the fervent prayers of the seers in the Vedic period to Vedic gods, through the more articulate conception in the Shvetasvara Upanishad, the emotion of Bhakti coursed through the centuries of Indian history. It went on widening its influence through the epics like Ramayana and the Mahabharata, deepening its intensity through the Puranas like the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*, and rationalizing its approach through the works like *Narada Bhakti Sutras* and *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*. Although the flow seemed to have ebbed, the passion of love can never dry out of the Indian heart. Thus arose a great movement in the religious and cultural history of India—the Bhakti Movement.

The Spread of Bhakti

Sometime during the third to sixth century A.D., two groups of mystic poets, the Alvars and the Nayanmars, arose in Tamil Nadu at different times and at different places. One group promoted the worship of Vishnu and the other, Shiva. The Alvars were twelve in number. The prominent among them were Nammalvar, Periya Alvar, Andal and Tirumangai Alvar. The Nayanmars were sixty-three in number. The prominent among them were Appar, Sundarar, Tirugnanasambandar and Manickavacakar.



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Some of them travelled extensively and even visited the Northern states of India. Many of the Alvars and Nayanmars were



Nayanmars

not Brahmins by birth, and hailed from communities of peasants, traders, washermen, potters, fishermen, hunters and even toddy tappers. These mystics, immersed as they were in the deepest emotion of devotion and surrender to the Lord, expressed their mystical experiences and realizations in songs that countered the atheistic and even monistic ideas prevalent in the society then.

While the lives and teachings of the Nayanmars infused new enthusiasm into the Shaiva tradition, the lives and teaching of the Alvars influenced great Acharyas like Nathamuni (9th century), Yamunacharya (10th century) and Ramanujacharya (1017-1137) who codified and systematized their teachings into what is called the Vishishtadvaita philosophy. Later philosopher-saints like Madhvacharya (1238-1317), Vallabha (1479-1532) and Chaitanya (1485-1533) formulated their own philosophies of devotional theism. All these schools of thought are collectively called the Bhakti Schools of Vedanta, which gave

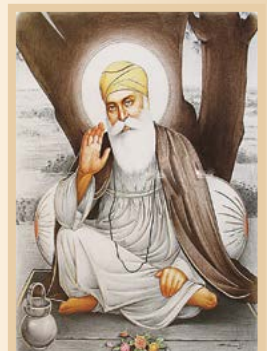
immense philosophical and legendary impetus to the Bhakti Movement.

The devotional fervour of the Alvars and the Nayanmars and the philosophical legacies of the Acharyas travelled north in due course of time and gave momentum to the Bhakti Movement that swept throughout North India between the 14th and the 17th centuries. Unlike the Bhakti Movement of the South which was centered on Vishnu and Shiva, the Bhakti Movement of the North rallied around Rama and Krishna. Ramananda (1400-1470) emerged as a popular Vaishnava Bhakti saint in North India. Initiated into the Sri Vaishnava tradition of Ramanujacharya and intensely devoted to Sri Rama, he extensively spread the path of Ram-bhakti throughout North India. He accepted his disciples irrespective of their caste and social status. Among them were Kabir (a Muslim), Raidas (a shoemaker), and Sena (a barber). He had women disciples too.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh tradition, counted as one of the great poet-saints of Hindu Bhakti tradition, emphasized the chanting of



Alvars

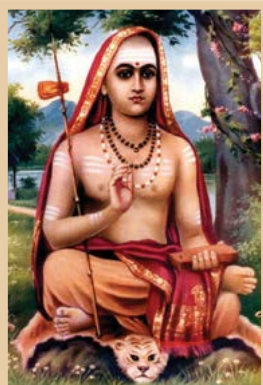


Guru Nanak

the names of God and the singing of bhajans, which he called *shabad*, for achieving union with God. The songs of Ramananda, and those

These traditions focused on esoteric and emotional aspects of devotion. Chaitanya was the most popular and influential saint of Bengal. He held the most enjoyable aspect of God before the people who generally had a hankering for beauty, sweetness, love and pleasure.

On the western side of Indian devotional canopy, appeared great mystic poets like Jnanesvar (1275-1296), Namdev (1270-1350), Tukaram (1598-1649) and Eknath (1533-1606) who ushered the Varkari tradition with passionate devotion to Lord Vittala of Pandarpur.



Sri Shankaracharya



Sri Ramanujacharya



Sri Madhvacharya

of Kabir and Jayadeva, who came later, are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Vallabhacharya (1473-1531), the philosopher saint of Andhra Pradesh, popularized Krishna Bhakti. Among those who followed in his footsteps in the North were Surdas (1483-1563) and Mira Bai (1503-1573) who flooded the entire North India with their songs and devotional fervour. Tulasidas (1532-1623), one of the greatest poet-saints, reformer and philosopher in North India, immersed the masses with devotion to Sri Rama through his classic *Rama Charita Manas*.

On the eastern horizon, the Bhakti movement was spearheaded by Jayadev (13th century), Chandidas (15th century) and Chaitanya in Bengal and Shankaradeva (1449-1568) in Assam. The Vaishnava Bhakti Movement in Bengal was very different from its counterparts in North India and the South. It was influenced by the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition of the Bhagavata Purana and the Sahajiya Buddhist and Nathpanthi traditions.

Revolutionary saints like Samarth Ramdas (1608-81) also appeared on the Maratha soil.

And in the South, Annamacharya (1408-1503), Vyasaraaya (1460-1539) and his illustrious disciples Purandaradasa (1484-1564) and Kanakadasa (1509-1609), Bhadrachala Ramadas (1620-1680) and Thyagaraja (1767-1847) flooded the land with their devotion and music.

Salient Features of Bhakti Movement

However the Bhakti Movement was neither organized nor was it centrally controlled by any religious leader. The innate potential of Hinduism produced these mystics and saints, philosophers and poets, to inspire people through their God-intoxicated lives and to teach the people to cast aside the heavy burdens of rituals and customs, hair-splitting logic and vain polemics, and to simply and wholly express their overwhelming love for God. They opened the gates of religion, particularly devotion, to all, irrespective of

caste, community, gender, social status or language, and encouraged everyone to directly and intensely experience God. Even though their teachings were not always similar, yet the essence of what they preached was common.

Some of these commonalities may be briefly stated as follows:

- ❖ Belief in one Supreme God—the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe
- ❖ Emphasis on devotion to God as the way to attain salvation
- ❖ Necessity of Guru to attain Bhakti
- ❖ Complete surrender of one's ego and taking refuge in God
- ❖ Stress on noble life and conduct
- ❖ Equal accessibility of God to all
- ❖ Disapproving excessive rites and rituals without devotion
- ❖ Disapproving vain scholarship

The Bhakti Movement peacefully coexisted with other schools of Hinduism. And if Hinduism has survived in spite of external aggressions and internal upheavals, it is largely due to the galaxy of these mystics and Acharyas of the Bhakti Movement.

Historians have their own theories for the rise of Bhakti Movement.

Some say the advent of Islam and the spread of Sufism is the cause of the Bhakti Movement. Some others say the Movement was a reaction to the feudal oppression. The anti-feudal tone in the songs of saints like Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya and Tulsidas are pointed as illustrations. One may very well say that the very Bhakti Movement was a natural and spontaneous response of

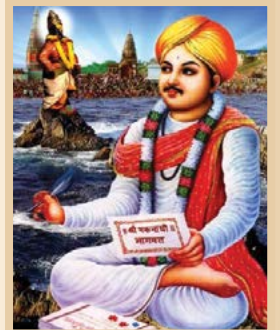
Hinduism to directly or indirectly address the social and religious issues, without however dislocating or distorting the allegiance of the Hindus towards their religion or their scriptures. They taught the masses the core and essence of Hindu religion according to their understanding and experience, and encouraged and motivated everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, gender or social status, to strive to attain God and lead a God-centered life here and now. However, Islam may have influenced a few Bhakti saints like Kabir and Nanak who may have taken up some of their ideas from Islam, prompting them to lean towards the formless aspect of Personal God, rejection of doctrine of divine incarnation, and the concept of *nirguna bhakti upasana*. But these ideas too were very much part of the Hindu thought even then.

Bhakti's Influence on Indian Culture

Culture is the reflection of an individual's or a nation's values, beliefs, outlook of life and mode of living. Culture is the external expression of the inner philosophy of life the person or nation abides by. And in India, philosophy is deeply influenced by religion, and therefore culture is also deeply influenced by religion. In fact, not only the themes of cultural forms like art, music, dance etc are predominantly religious in flavor, but the very essence and



Tyagaraja



Eknath



Meera Bai

mode of cultural form is permeated and percolated with religious values. Any change or enrichment in the religious values will therefore change or supplement the texture of Indian culture. Bhakti Movement has had a profound influence on the Indian culture. It not only enriched various aspects of culture, but also initiated new modes of cultural expressions.



Kabir

Perhaps the most profound influence and contribution of the Bhakti Movement to the Indian Culture is in composing of songs and poetry and in revitalizing music and group singing. The intertwining of Bhajan and Bhakti, song and devotion,

is largely due to the fact that the path of Bhakti from its very beginning was preached through songs. The intense emotional attachment the Bhakti saints had towards their Divine inspired copious volumes of excellent religious poetry and played a major role in propagating

religious aspirations and sentiments through these songs. Meerabai composed more than 1200 songs conveying her surrender to Krishna and her longing to unite with Him in simple rhythm and repeating refrain that encouraged millions to repeat the songs and relive the moods of intense longing. In many parts of North India, especially Rajasthan, her Bhajans have become part



Surdas

of religious gathering and folk culture. Surdas is said to have composed more than a hundred thousand songs (though only about 8000 is available now), collectively called Sur-Sagar, apart from writing *Sur-Saravali* and *Sahitya-Lahiri*.

In Vrindavan near Delhi, Swami Haridas promoted music and is considered to have taught Tansen who was at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Tansen is regarded as an important exponent of the Hindustani classical music and is credited with introducing ragas as the Miyan ka Malhar, Miyan ki Todi and Darbari.

Eknath initiated in Maharashtra a movement called Vasudeva Sanstha, which involved visiting house to house and spreading religious messages through Bhajans. He introduced a new form of religious song called Bharood, apart from composing a few hundred Abhangas. Namdev and Tukaram composed several thousand Abhangas that were very popular and which helped in uniting people spiritually during the difficult days of foreign aggressions.

The Vallabha tradition directly contributed to the theory and practice of music. The religious and musical procedures of the followers of this tradition were systematized by Vallabha's son Goswami Vitthalnathji (1516-1698). The 'Ashtachap' stream of music was thus established. It was named after the eight musical Acharyas or preceptors who composed the music of the tradition. The tradition created a rich tapestry of temple-based music called 'Haveli Sangeet'.

Purandaradasa composed more than thousand songs, mostly in Kannada and some in Sanskrit. He is considered to be the father of Carnatic music. He was a performer, a musicologist, and the founder of musical pedagogy. His classification of *swaravali*,

jantivarase, *alamkara*, and *lakshana* factors are the standards even today throughout South India. He was the first composer to include daily events in his compositions. He set his lyrics to folk tunes so that even a common man

can learn and sing them. He had great influence on Hindustani music also. Kanakadasa contributed more than 240 Kirtanas and Ugabhogas to Carnatic music.

Annamacharya is said to have composed as many as 36,000 songs on Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati, though only about 12,000 songs are available today. Thyagaraja revolutionized and gave direction to Carnatic music. He was so creative that he could turn

simple tunes into ragas like Kharaharapriya, Harikambhoji and Devagandhari. He contributed more than 24000 kritis (though only 700 kritis are available now). His musical genius is reflected in every song of his, but his immortal Pancha Rathna Kritis, with each song set in different raga and tala reveal the mastery he had over musical techniques.

Chaitanya popularized the Sankirtan (group devotional singing accompanied with ecstatic dancing) in the homes, in the temples, and even on the streets. One should also mention the Baul movement in Bengal with following both among the Hindus and Muslims. Later, Bengal produced saints like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta who left a legacy of songs to the Divine Mother.

The Influence on Language and Literature

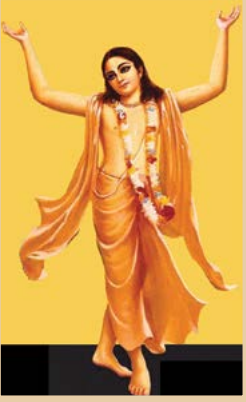
Another profound cultural enrichment through the Bhakti Movement, closely related

to Indian music, was to Indian literature. Indian literature had always commanded the deepest attention of any inquisitive student of Indian Culture with its overwhelming volume, profundity and sublimity. Since the earliest sacred writings of the Vedas, there had been a dynamic development of literature through the ages, especially in Sanskrit. The Bhakti Movement has its own contributions to the Sanskrit literature through the learned theological and devotional works of the Acharyas and rapturous masterpieces like *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva (12th century). However, the Bhakti Movement had something more to contribute to the Indian literary heritage—the development of regional languages in India.

Alvars and Nayanmars composed their mystical songs in Tamil. Ramananda initiated philosophical and theological discussions in Hindi through his works like *Matanbuj Bhaskar*, *Sri Ramarachan Padhti* and *Anandabhashya*. Surdas and Meera enriched Hindi literature through their entreating songs. Tulsidas, though attempted to compose songs in Sanskrit, ended up writing his classics in Awadhi and Braja dialects, thereby giving scope for these dialects to develop and flourish.

Kabir's compositions were in a pithy and homely style, replete with imageries and similes. He expressed his poems orally in Hindi, freely mixing it with expressions of dialects like Awadhi, Braj and Bhojpuri. A considerable number of songs and poetry of Kabir have been passed on to the next generation through oral traditions. Thus oral traditions were revitalized.

Jnaneswar composed his masterpiece *Jnaneswari* and *Abhangas* in Marathi, which are reckoned as very original and priceless compositions in their literary evaluation. Eknath, apart from rediscovering and



Chaitanya Mahaprabu

popularizing Jnaneswari, wrote a voluminous and detailed commentary on eleventh canto of the Bhagavatam in Marathi. Tukaram's abhangas, which run into thousands, were all in Marathi.

Chaitanya Charitamrita, the celebrated biography of Chaitanya written by Krishnadas Kaviraj, and *Chaitanya Bhagabata*, the hagiography of Chaitanya, both written in Bengali, are literary classics in that language.

Shankaradeva who introduced Vaishnavism in Assam also stimulated the growth of Assamese poetry. His disciple, Madhavadas, wrote in Assamese the *Bhakti-ratnavali* dealing with aspects of Bhakti and the Baragitas that depicted the life of Krishna in Vrindavan. There were also translations of the Puranas into Assamese. Vidyapati wrote his songs on Radha and Krishna in Maithili language.

Arunagirinathar (15th century), the famous devotee of Lord Muruga (Karthik) in Tamil Nadu, composed his *magnum opus* 'Tiruppugazh', which consisted of 16,000 songs, blending literature and devotion harmoniously. His poems coupled elegant lyricism with complex rhymes and rhythmic structures and are known for its poetical and musical qualities, as well as for its religious, moral and philosophical content.

The compositions of Annamacharya, Bhadrachala Ramdas, and Thyagaraja were all in Telugu. Apart from the famous kritis, Thyagaraja authored two musical plays in Telugu, *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam* and *Nauka Charitam*, using some of the best and beautiful literary expression in Telugu language. Vyasaraya, Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa's works were in Kannada.

In short, rendering the intricate doctrines of religion and truths of highest spirituality in a simple and familiar language so that even the most illiterate person can understand them

has been the most important contribution of the Bhakti Movement to literature. Apart from the direct contributions of the Bhakti saints to the regional literary enrichment, the Bhakti Movement acted as a source of inspiration for subsequent regional literary developments. Volumes of Bhakti and other religious literature were composed and written in regional languages thenceforth.

The upsurge of Bhakti in society influenced the themes and forms of dances prevalent in India. Indian dance and drama, as a whole, including folk dance and street plays, became popular by taking devotional themes which were rich in emotional content, sentiments and values, thereby enriching its own cultural value.

Temples and Architecture

One more important influence of the Bhakti Movement was the intense urge to establish magnificent temples as an expression of devotion. The Rajarajeshwara Temple at Tanjore, the Udayeshwara Temple at Udaipur, Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar, and the Jagannath Temple at Puri represent the best of the devout architectural urge. Several rock temples and massive temples built by Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras in Tamil Nadu and temples built by the Chalukyan and Vijayanagara dynasties in Karnataka, bringing in a new era of art and architecture, owe their influence to the Bhakti Movement.

Throughout India, the temples began to function as the nucleus of religious life and social congregation. They became the seats for disseminating religious and cultural values through discourses and discussions and acted as a stage for evolving collective dance and music art forms like *ghata-nibandhan*. They strengthened the theistic feelings and involved the people in a very intimate way. It was in

the temples that the Hindu ritualistic practices and theistic devotional aspirations met and achieved confluence thereby integrating Vedic traditions and Bhakti aspirations.

Promoting Social Inclusiveness

And finally, the Bhakti Movement redefined many social values.

Right from the Alvars and the Nayanmars, the Bhakti saints showed through their lives that saintliness and devotion is not dependent on caste or birth. They demonstrated and preached that anybody having intense passion of devotion can have immediate experience of God. So emphasis on caste or birth for religious living began to break. That the so-called untouchables like Tiruppanalvar, Nandanar, Ravidas, etc., sinners turned saints like Vipra Narayana (Tondaradipodialvar) and Arunagirinathar, 'uneducated' Kabir, Nanak or Tukaram, women like Andal, Meerabai, Karaikal Ammaiyar and Akka Mahadevi could turn into saints. That these saints were revered and followed even by the orthodox sections of Hindu society showing that saintliness was given more importance than caste, birth, education or gender.

Ramanuja, through his doctrine of *sharanagati* (self-surrender to God), opened the gates of salvation to all, even to the lowliest and the meek, and reinstalled confidence and dignity in their social living. He took revolutionary steps to allow the so-called untouchables into temples and even admitted Muslims into his fold. Imbibing this spirit of Ramanuja, Ramananda became an influential social reformer in Northern India and took a very radical approach to include

the poor and the downtrodden into a common fold. Kabir strived to interfuse ideas of Hinduism and Islam so that both Hindus and Muslims can tread the spiritual path harmoniously. For him, Bhakti not only transcended its caste boundaries but also the religious boundaries.

Eknath was one of the earliest reformers of untouchability in Maharashtra and Annamacharya initiated reforms in Andhra Pradesh. Saints like Samarth Ramdas not only inspired the people in devotionals, but also urged them to initiate and implement social and

political reforms to establish a healthy and secure society. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa addressed social issues through their compositions. Kanakadasa graphically portrays through allegories in his unique literary work, *Ramadhanyacharitre*, the conflict between the rich and the poor. Kanakadasa vociferously condemned the social evils and took great efforts in reforming the under privileged communities.

As a result, India's spiritual culture regained its strength to resist pressures from socio-political forces from abroad and the decadent atheistic reform movements within the nation, and marched on with its unparalleled adaptability to the needs of time and to inspire generation after generation to regain faith in their religion and spiritual heritage that was rightly theirs. □



Kanakadasa



Fix thy mind on Me only, place thy intellect in Me: (then) thou shalt no doubt live in Me hereafter. —*Bhagavad Gita*, 12.8

The Indian Tradition of Sacred Body Marks

Whether it is a Tilak or a Vibhuti or a sandal paste on the forehead, one sees many types of religious marks used by Hindu devotees all over India. These marks are external symbols of people's religious beliefs and position. Just as in other faiths have their customs, Indian tradition too has its unique practices. These markings are made either as a daily ritual, or on special occasions, and denotes which particular lineage, or *sampradaya* the devotee belongs to.

Let us have look at some of these:

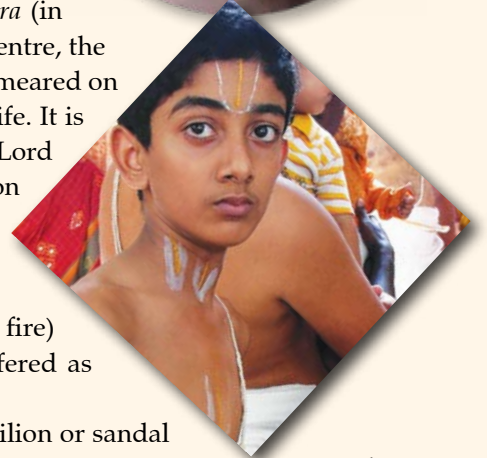
Vibhuti / Bhasma or sacred ash is associated with the devotees of Shiva. It is applied on the forehead as a *tripundra* (in three horizontal lines). When applied with a red spot in the centre, the mark symbolizes Shiva-Shakti. Sometimes ashes are simply smeared on the forehead, without drawing any line. Ash is symbolic of life. It is what remains when all the wood is burnt away. Similarly, the Lord is imperishable Truth that remains when the entire creation of innumerable names and forms is dissolved. Ashes also remind of the ephemeral nature of life. 'Vibhuti' also refers to glorious attributes of the divine.

Generally, Bhasma is the ash from the Homa (sacrificial fire) where special wood along with ghee and other herbs is offered as worship of the Lord.

Tilak (tilaka or tika) is long vertical line or two of vermilion or sandal paste on the forehead. It is indicative of a devotee of Vishnu. There are variations (according to one tradition there are 19 ways of Tilak!) with regard the material used or certain additions to the mark. These differ from sect to sect. Tilak can be applied to twelve parts of the body: head, forehead, neck, both upper-arms, both forearms, chest, both sides of the torso, stomach and shoulder. Sometimes Tilak is put to indicate that a person has been to temple, irrespective of the denomination he belongs to. Even devotees of Divine Mother use it.

Urdhva Pundra is the mark applied by followers of Sri Vaishnava. It is applied by drawing the figure 'U' vertically on the forehead, with a red vertical line in the middle. Two lines are representative of the feet of Lord Narayana and the red line of Divine Mother Lakshmi. Also called Namam or SrichurNam, this type of mark is used by all priests and devotees of Vishnu temple in south India. It is made by sandal paste or gopichandana.

Most of these marks are put daily or on special occasions. Also, at times, special mantras are chanted while putting these marks. □



Indian Ideals and Western Perspectives

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The Indian Ideal

Rama and Sita are the ideals of the Indian nation. All children, especially girls, worship Sita. The height of a woman's ambition is to be like Sita, the pure, the devoted, the all-suffering! When you study these characters, you can at once find out how different is the ideal in India from that of the West. For the race, Sita stands as the ideal of suffering. The West says, 'Do! Show your power by doing.' India says, 'Show your power by suffering.' The West has solved the problem of how much a man can have: India has solved the problem of how little a man can have. The two extremes, you see.

Sita is typical of India—the idealised India. The question is not whether she ever lived, whether the story is history or not, we know that the ideal is there. There is no other Pauranika story that has so permeated the whole nation, so entered into its very life, and has so tingled in every drop of blood of the race, as this ideal of Sita. Sita is the name in India for everything that is good, pure and holy—everything that in woman we call womanly. If a priest has to bless a woman he says, 'Be Sita!' If he blesses a child, he says 'Be Sita!' They are all children of Sita, and are struggling to be Sita, the patient, the all-suffering, the ever-faithful, the ever-pure wife.

Through all this suffering she experiences, there is not one harsh word against Rama. She takes it as her own duty, and performs her own part in it. Think of the terrible injustice of her being exiled to the forest! But Sita knows no bitterness. That is, again, the Indian ideal. Says the ancient Buddha, 'When a man hurts you, and you turn back to hurt him, that would not cure the first injury; it would only create in the world one more wickedness.' Sita was a true Indian by nature; she never returned injury.

Who knows which is the truer ideal? The apparent power and strength, as held in the West, or the fortitude in suffering, of the East?

Two Approaches

The West says, 'We minimise evil by conquering it.' India says, 'We destroy evil by suffering, until evil is nothing to us, it becomes positive enjoyment.' Well, both are great ideals. Who knows which will survive in the long run? Who knows which attitude will really most benefit humanity? Who knows which will disarm and conquer animality? Will it be suffering, or doing?

In the meantime, let us not try to destroy each other's ideals. We are both intent upon the same work, which is the annihilation of evil. You take up your method; let us take up our method. Let us not destroy the ideal. I do not say to the West, 'Take up our method.' Certainly not. The goal is the same, but the methods can never be the same. And so, after hearing about the ideals of India, I hope that you will say in the same breath to India, 'We know, the goal, the ideal, is all right for us both. You follow your own ideal. You follow your method in your own way, and Godspeed to you!' My message in life is to ask the East and West not to quarrel over different ideals, but to show them that the goal is the same in

both cases, however opposite it may appear. As we wend our way through this mazy vale of life, let us bid each other Godspeed.¹ In Western countries, as a rule, people lay more stress on the body aspect of man; those philosophers who wrote on Bhakti in India laid stress on the spiritual side of man; and this difference seems to be typical of the Oriental and Occidental nations. It is so even in common language. In England, when speaking of death it is said, a man gave up his ghost; in India, a man gave up his body. The one idea is that man is a body and has a soul; the other that man is a soul and has a body. More intricate problems arise out of this. It naturally follows that the ideal which holds that man is a body and has a soul lays all the stress on the body. If you ask why man lives, you will be told it is to enjoy the senses, to enjoy possessions and wealth. He cannot dream of anything beyond even if he is told of it; his idea of a future life would be a continuation of this enjoyment. He is very sorry that it cannot continue all the time here, but he has to depart; and he thinks that somehow or other he will go to some place where the same thing will be renewed. He will have the same enjoyments, the same senses, only heightened and strengthened. He wants to worship God, because God is the means to attain this end. The goal of his life is enjoyment of sense-objects, and he comes to know there is a Being who can give him a very long lease of these enjoyments, and that is why he worships God.

On the other hand the Indian idea is that God is the goal of life; there is nothing beyond God, and the sense-enjoyments are simply something through which we are passing now in the hope of getting better things. Not only so; it would be disastrous and terrible if man had nothing but sense-enjoyments. In our everyday life we find that the less the

sense-enjoyments, the higher the life of the man. Look at the dog when he eats. No man ever ate with the same satisfaction. Observe the pig giving grunts of satisfaction as he eats; it is his heaven, and if the greatest archangel came and looked on, the pig would not even notice him. His whole existence is in his eating. No man was ever born who could eat that way. Think of the power of hearing in lower animals, the power of seeing; all their senses are highly developed. Their enjoyment of the senses is extreme; they become simply mad with delight and pleasure. And the lower the man also, the more delight he finds in the senses. As he gets higher, the goal becomes reason and love. In proportion as these faculties develop, he loses the power of enjoying the senses.²

With us [the Indians], the prominent idea is Mukti; with the Westerners, it is Dharma. What we desire is Mukti; what they want is Dharma. Here the word 'Dharma' is used in the sense of the Mimamsakas. What is Dharma? Dharma is that which makes man seek for happiness in this world or the next. Dharma is established on work; Dharma is impelling man day and night to run after and work for happiness.³

Searching and Struggling

That is the one great first step—the real desire for the ideal. Everything comes easy after that. That the Indian mind found out; there, in India, men go to any length to find truth. But here, in the West, the difficulty is that everything is made so easy. It is not truth, but development, that is the great aim. The struggle is the great lesson. Mind you, the great benefit in this life is struggle. It is through that we pass. If there is any road to Heaven, it is through Hell. Through Hell to Heaven is always the way. When the soul has wrestled with circumstance and has met death, a thousand times death on the way, but nothing daunted has struggled forward again and again and yet again—then the soul comes out as a giant and laughs at the ideal he has been struggling



for, because he finds how much greater is he than the ideal. I am the end, my own Self, and nothing else, for what is there to compare to my own Self? Can a bag of gold be the ideal of my Soul? Certainly not! My Soul is the highest ideal that I can have. Realising my own real nature is the one goal of my life.⁴

The great lesson to learn is that I am not the standard by which the whole universe is to be judged; each man is to be judged by his own idea, each race by its own standard and ideal, each custom of each country by its own reasoning and conditions. American customs are the result of the environment in which the Americans live, and Indian customs are the result of the environment in which the Indians are; and so of China, Japan, England, and every other country.⁵

The Lasting Reconciliation

In India religion was never shackled. No man was ever challenged in the selection of his Ishta Devata, or his sect, or his preceptor, and religion grew, as it grew nowhere else. On the other hand, a fixed point was necessary to allow this infinite variation to religion, and society was chosen as that point in India. As a result, society became rigid and almost immovable. For liberty is the only condition of growth.

On the other hand, in the West, the field of variation was society, and the constant point was religion. Conformity was the watchword, and even now is the watchword of European religion, and each new departure had to gain the least advantage only by wading through a river of blood. The result is a splendid social

organisation, with a religion that never rose beyond the grossest materialistic conceptions.

Today the West is awakening to its wants; and the 'true self of man and spirit' is the watchword of the advanced school of Western theologians. The student of Sanskrit philosophy knows where the wind is blowing from, but it matters not whence the power comes so long as it brings new life.

In India, new circumstances at the same time are persistently demanding a new adjustment of social organisations. For the last three-quarters of a century, India has been bubbling over with reform societies and reformers. But, alas, every one of them has proved a failure. They did not know the secret. They had not learnt the great lesson to be learnt. In their haste, they laid all the evils in our society at the door of religion; and like the man in the story, wanting to kill the mosquito that sat on a friend's forehead, they were trying to deal such heavy blows as would have killed man and mosquito together. But in this case, fortunately, they only dashed themselves against immovable rocks and were crushed out of existence in the shock of recoil. Glory unto those noble and unselfish souls who have struggled and failed in their misdirected attempts. Those galvanic shocks of reformatory zeal were necessary to rouse the sleeping leviathan. But they were entirely destructive, and not constructive, and as such they were mortal, and therefore died.⁶

Renunciation and spirituality are the two great ideas of India, and it is because India clings to these ideas that all her mistakes count for so little.⁷ □



- References :**
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| 1. CW, 4: 75-77 | 2. CW, 4:12-13 | 3. CW, 5:446 | 4. CW, 5: 252-253 |
| 5. CW, 5: 241 | 6. CW, 4: 346 | 7. CW, 2:372 | |

Sanskrit—the Language of Indian Culture

‘Sanskrit and prestige go together in India. The very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige and a power and a strength to the race,’ said Swami Vivekananda.

Sanskrit is the primary source of Indian cultural traditions. Though now it is primarily written in Devanagari script, earlier Brahmi, Grantha and other scripts were also used. Many of India’s other indigenous scripts such as Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and other are also used for writing Sanskrit. Today, it is listed as one of the 22 scheduled languages of India and is an official language of the state of Uttarakhand.

The term Sanskrit means ‘the cultured language’. The oldest surviving system of Sanskrit grammar is called *Ashtadhyayi* (‘Eight-Chapter Grammar’) of Panini (probably 4th century BCE). Other popular works on Sanskrit include books such as *Laghu Sidhanta Kaumudi* and a number of books in different Indian languages.

The pre-classical form of Sanskrit is known as Vedic Sanskrit, with the language of the Rigveda being the oldest and most archaic, its oldest core dating back to as early as 4500 BCE. A significant form of post-Vedic Sanskrit is found in the Sanskrit of two great Indian Epics—the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Whatever be its antiquity, Sanskrit is of a superb structure; ‘more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar.’

Classical Sanskrit is the standard register as laid out in the grammar of Panini. Its position in the cultures of Greater India is akin to that of Latin and Greek in Europe and it has significantly influenced most modern languages in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The corpus of Sanskrit literature encompasses a rich tradition of poetry and drama as well as scientific, technical, philosophical and dharma texts. Sanskrit continues to be widely used as a ceremonial language in Hindu religious rituals and Buddhist practice in the forms of hymns and mantras. Spoken Sanskrit is still in use in a few traditional institutions and its use is on rise in some parts of India and even beyond where there have been attempts to revive it. The Sahitya Akademi has had, since 1967, an award for the best creative work written that year in Sanskrit. In 2009, Satyavrat Shastri became the first Sanskrit author to win the Jnanpith Award, India’s highest literary award.

European scholarship in Sanskrit was begun by Heinrich Roth (1620-1668) and Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681-1731). This scholarship is regarded as responsible for the discovery of the Indo-European language family by Sir William Jones and it played an important role in the development of Western philology, or historical linguistics. □

Origin of the Vedic Culture

NVC SWAMY

The Indian History

There is much truth in the maxim: 'The history of a country is written by its conquerors.' In no instance is this truer than in the case of India. India's ancient culture has a vast legacy, but not in the sense of what is known today as 'history'. There appears to have been over-modesty on the part of our great writers, about whom we hardly know anything. It is only from the time of the Muslim rulers that we find chroniclers recording events as they unfolded. This continued on to the British period. But, all these recordings were from the point of view of the conquering rulers, never from the point of view of the subject country. It is this history of ancient India that is still being taught to our school children.

Almost all our textbooks on Indian History prescribed for students of schools and colleges commence with the famous, or probably infamous, 'Aryan Invasion Theory'. This was the product of the fertile imagination of Friedrich Maximilian Mueller (popularly known as Max Muller). Though born and brought up in Prussia, he had his education in Paris, and later became the Professor of Oriental Philosophy at Oxford University, England. He became well-known for his translation of the Rig-Veda, and as the Editor of *Sacred Books of the East*, the monumental

50-volume set of English translations of Asian religious writings series.

Aryan Invasion Theory

What is this 'Aryan Invasion Theory'? The theory says: Once upon a time, around 4000 years ago, there lived a group of fair-skinned people in Central Asia, or maybe in Persia, or maybe even in Russia. For some unknown reason, they left their homeland, crossed the Himalayas and landed in Punjab, where there were fertile valleys watered by big rivers. The local inhabitants looked like savages, dark in color. The Aryans could easily conquer them because of their superior might, and drove them away to the south. These tribes settled down in the South of India, and became the Dravidians! A very neat classification indeed, but absolutely baseless. It is still the favorite theory of historians with a Marxist bent of mind.

Modern Developments

What, then, is the truth about Aryans? During the last century, many new facts have come to light. Because of them we have now a better idea of what really might have happened. The first was the discovery of the ancient ruins in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, in the western part of our country, during the early part of the last century. This was



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the work, basically of John Marshall, the Director-General of the newly established Archaeological Survey of India in Kolkata, and his officer, Rakhal Das Banerjee. There was an intense debate whether these ruins represented the destroyed cities of the Dravidians. The debate raged on till India gained its independence. The colonial powers were no longer there to bias any new discoveries to suit their limited ends.

In the 1970s, the Government of India launched a project of bringing the latest technologies to the villages, by providing them with TV sets for community viewing. This was the famous SITE, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment, which provided not only News, but also weather bulletins based on satellite imagery. Normally, in any pictures taken by a geo-satellite, warm terrain on the earth is indicated by red color, and cool terrain, including water masses, is shown as blue or green. In these pictures, the area of Rajasthan was shown as predominantly red, with streaks of blue, indicating the river Sindhu and its tributaries. But, slightly to its east was seen another wide blue patch, which could only be another bigger river! But this seemed impossible, since there are no other rivers flowing through Rajasthan and its border with Pakistan.

This was indeed grist to the mill of scholars. Experts from several diverse disciplines jumped into the fray. There were satellite technologists, metallurgists, computer scientists, archaeologists, Vedic scholars and even mathematicians. Their joint efforts finally provided a scenario, which appears highly plausible.

River Saraswati

The blue patch is the trace of a sunken river flowing below the surface. But, 'seeing is

believing', as the saying goes. In order to check it out, Dr. Wakankar of the Archaeological Survey led an expedition along the track of the sunken river. He conducted diggings at several places and found clear potable water at depths ranging from 100 meters to a kilometer! It was at this stage that Vedic scholars came into the picture. They expressed the opinion that this sunken river must be the river Saraswati, which is described in the Rig-Veda and about which there is a Sukta also.

If this were indeed the river Saraswati, why did it sink underground? Scholars have given several reasons for it. The one hypothesis that has found common acceptance is that it was due to a massive earthquake leading to the source of the river being blocked. This caused the river to dry up and become the small stream, now known as Ghaggar.

The Saraswati was the giant river on whose banks the Vedic culture flourished. The Vedic civilization was indigenous to the soil of India and was not imported from elsewhere. The Vedic people were so grateful to the river that they deified it as a Goddess. She is worshipped even today as the 'giver of knowledge' and as the Shakti or power of Brahma the Creator.

The Vedic people inhabited both the banks of the river. The river itself was so wide that, to cross it from one bank to another, they needed big boats. That the Vedic people were aware of boat-building is attested to by several ruins of dockyards along the path of the river, especially at places like Dhaulavira. They were adventurous enough to venture out to the sea, and establish their culture at far-off places like Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia. Though some historians have disputed these facts, one cannot ignore them. The pity is that these latest findings have not found their proper place in Indian history textbooks!

Origins of the River Saraswati

How did the river Saraswati come into existence? It is a well-established fact that the magnetic field of the earth undergoes periodic reversals. The normal axis of this field is aligned with the axis of the earth, both the north poles pointing in the same direction. But, sometimes, the magnetic field reverses its polarity, its north now aligned with the south pole of the Earth. The entire weather pattern now undergoes a radical transformation, with ice accumulating in the tropical and sub-tropical regions, and the north and south poles completely bereft of all ice. This heralds what is known as the 'Ice Age'. When the magnetic field aligns itself once again with the axis of the earth, the weather pattern again changes, with the tropical regions again becoming warm and the poles cold. This is known as the 'End of the Ice Age'.

The last Ice Age is considered to have ended around 12,000 years ago, in 10,000 BCE. The tropical ice then started melting and flooding the land. This is estimated to have lasted for 2000 years, giving rise to the oceans, seas and rivers. The memory of this flood has been recorded by ancient cultures in the form of legends. *Srimad Bhagavatam* refers to Lord Vishnu assuming the form of a giant fish and towing the boat of Manu and Satarupa during the flood. The Old Testament talks of Noah and his Ark.

By 8000 BCE, the floods had subsided and the giant river systems had emerged, on the banks of which various world cultures developed. The Mississippi and Missouri complex was the home of the 'Red Indian Culture', the Amazon that of the Incas, Mayans and Aztecs, the Nile that of the Egyptians, the Volga-Danube that of the Druids, the Euphrates-Tigris that of the Middle East cultures, the Yangtze-Kiang that of the Chinese and the Saraswati that of the Vedic people. This was the setting in which our scriptures came into

existence. These are hard facts, established by science, and not the fertile imaginings of a human brain.

Drying up of the River

The river Saraswati is estimated to have dried up around 4000 years ago, around 2000 BCE, giving rise to the current deserts of Rajasthan. The people living on both the banks migrated. The eastward immigrants settled down in the Ganga-Yamuna plains, the two rivers now becoming big, having received the waters received earlier by Saraswati. This is where Puranas, the great Hindu epics, along with the various mythologies, came into existence. The westward immigrants settled down in Persia. They were the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, whose descendants returned home after Persia became Iran, an Islamic state. They are the modern Parsis of India, for whom fire is the holiest icon. One section of these Persians migrated further west, interacting with the other cultures on their way. The Mithraic culture of the Middle East considered the Sun, Mithras, as their main deity. Incidentally, Mitra is a name of the sun in Sanskrit, and is the first name to be mentioned during Surya Namaskara, *Om Mitraya Namaha!* Is it any wonder that scholars are discovering connections among all ancient cultures?

The strangest of all these is the newly established fact that one of the tribes of the Native Cultures of the North American continent, the Hopi Indians, consider their ancestors to have migrated from India long ago. As proof they cite the fact that their main deity is the 'Elephant-headed God', Ganapati. They claim to have been the discoverers of Kundalini and even of Yoga! Interestingly, there are three short peaks on the edge of the Grand Canyon called Brahma, Vishnu and

Mahesh! That should give us enough food for thought. It appears that the Vedic people hit the nail on the head when they declared- *Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti*, and in later literature, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Apparently, it is only this still extant culture in India that continues to subscribe to this philosophy, as world history has repeatedly shown.

The Vedic Culture

What were the basic characteristics of this culture? Many scholars have found the Rig-Veda and the Atharva Veda to be rich sources for getting an idea of the way the Vedic people had organized their lives. It was basically an agrarian way of life, with the cow as a sort of currency. For example, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda there is the story of King Janaka offering to the best scholar of his time an award of 1000 cows with gilded horns. The cow was an indicator of prosperity and was held in deep respect. Society was divided into four groups or Varnas, depending upon the character of one's profession. This is what degenerated later into the much-maligned caste system.

There were many kings as rulers, living on both the banks, who used to have occasional wars. There is a description in the Rig-Veda of a major war in which ten kings were involved. But, their participation in wars was of a very peculiar nature. No one other than the Kshatriyas would participate in the war. Normal life was not disturbed, because the battle used to be confined to certain fields. It would be fought only between dawn and sunset. It is the infringement of this code during the Mahabharata war that is considered to be the onset of Kaliyuga or the age of lawlessness.

Conclusion

Today, thanks to the efforts of several experts from diverse fields, we are in a position to understand and appreciate our ancient culture much better. Shorn of all later superstitious encrustations, it shines forth as a grand testimony to human endeavor to understand the truth of Aryan culture. This culture influenced the growth of practically all other ancient cultures around the world. The rest of the world is slowly accepting and appreciating the role played by the Vedic

culture in the evolution of world culture. Even Christianity is now inclined to accept that the teachings of Jesus the Christ, again shorn of all distortions, reflecting the influence of Vedantic thoughts on Jesus the Christ. This was the message that Swami Vivekananda had for the West, which he so eloquently and forcefully put forth in his talks and addresses abroad. In the 150th anniversary year of Swami Vivekananda's birth can there be a more appropriate homage? □



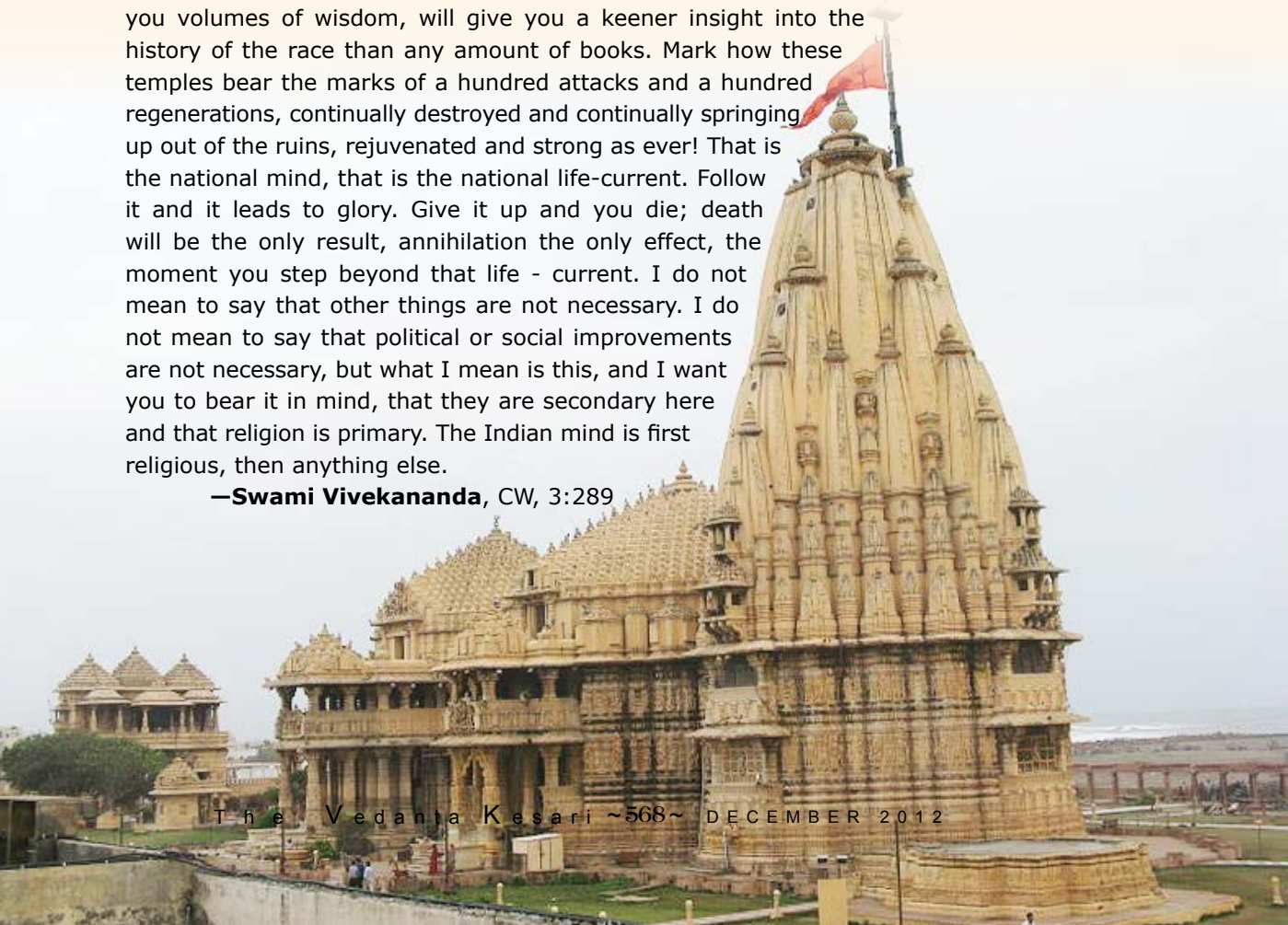
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The Indian Mind

Some of these old temples of Southern India and those like Somnath of Gujarat will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life - current. I do not mean to say that other things are not necessary. I do not mean to say that political or social improvements are not necessary, but what I mean is this, and I want you to bear it in mind, that they are secondary here and that religion is primary. The Indian mind is first religious, then anything else.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 3:289

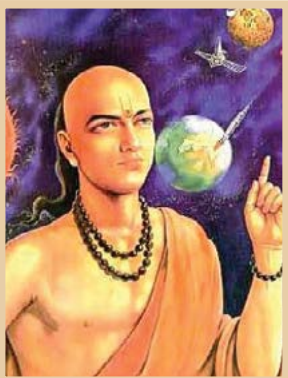


Aryabhata, the Great Indian Mathematician

Aryabhata (476–550 CE) was the first in the line of great mathematician-astronomers from the classical age of Indian mathematics and Indian astronomy. His most famous works are the *Aryabhatiya* and the *Arya-siddhanta*.

Aryabhata mentions in the *Aryabhatiya* that it was composed 3,630 years into the Kali Yuga, when he was 23 years old. This corresponds to 499 CE, and implies that he was born in 476.

Aryabhata was born in Taregna, a small town in Bihar, about 30 km from Patna (then known as Pataliputra), the capital city of Bihar State. In Taregna, Aryabhata set up an Astronomical Observatory in the Sun Temple. It is also speculated that Aryabhata might have been the head of the Nalanda University as well. [Some archaeological evidence suggests that Aryabhata could have originated from the present day Kodungallur which was a historical capital city in Kerala.]



Aryabhata is the author of several treatises on mathematics and astronomy, many of which are lost. His major work, *Aryabhatiya*, a compendium of mathematics and astronomy, was extensively referred to in the Indian mathematical literature and has survived to modern times. The mathematical part of the *Aryabhatiya* covers arithmetic, algebra, plane trigonometry, and spherical trigonometry. It has 108 verses and 13 introductory verses, and is divided into four padas or chapters:

The *Arya-siddhanta*, a work on astronomical computations, is known through the writings of Aryabhata's contemporary, Varahamihira, and later mathematicians and commentators, including Brahmagupta and Bhaskara I.

It also contained a description of several astronomical instruments.

A third text, which may have survived in the Arabic translation, is *Al ntf* or *Al-nanf*. It claims that it is a translation by Aryabhata, but the Sanskrit name of this work is not known. Probably dating from the 9th century, it is mentioned by the Persian scholar and chronicler of India, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni.

The *Aryabhatiya* presented a number of innovations in mathematics and astronomy in verse form, which were influential for many centuries. The extreme brevity of the text was elaborated in commentaries by his disciple Bhaskara I (Bhashya, c. 600 CE) and by Nilakantha Somayaji in his *Aryabhatiya Bhasya*, (1465 CE). He was not only the first to find the radius of the earth but was the only one in ancient time including the Greeks and the Romans to find the volume of the earth.

While he did not use a symbol for zero, the French mathematician Georges Ifrah explains that knowledge of zero was implicit in Aryabhata's place-value system.

Aryabhata worked on the approximation for pi (π). After *Aryabhatiya* was translated into Arabic (c. 820 CE) this approximation was mentioned in Al-Khwarizmi's book on algebra. □

Darshan—the Indian Idea of ‘Sacred Seeing’

Darshan, a Sanskrit term widely used in most Indian languages, means ‘sight’. Derived from the Sanskrit root *drik*, to see, the term darshan is most commonly used for ‘visions of the divine’ to mean, ‘seeing’ a deity (especially in image form), or a very holy person or artefact. One could ‘receive’ darshan or blessing of the deity in the temple, or from a great saintly person, such as a guru.

In the sense ‘to see with reverence and devotion’, it could also refer to a vision of the divine or being in the presence of a highly revered person. In this sense it may assume the meanings closer to audience. As goes the saying, ‘By doing darshan properly a devotee develops reverence for God, and God develops affection for that devotee.’

It is difficult to define since darshan is an event in consciousness—an interaction in presence between devotee and guru; or between devotee and image or sculpture, which focuses and calls out the consciousness of the devotee. In either event, a heightening of consciousness or spirituality is the intended effect. In the Bhagavad Gita (11.9-12), Arjuna is granted a ‘vision’ of God thus:

O King, Krishna, the great Lord of Yoga, revealed to Arjuna the true majesty of His form. . . Everywhere was boundless divinity, containing all astonishing things, wearing divine garlands and garments. . . If the light of a thousand suns were to rise in the sky at once it would be like the light of that spirit.

Further, in Indian culture, doing pranam (touching of elders’ feet as an act of showing respect) is an integral part of darshan. Children touch the feet of their family elders while people of all ages will bend to touch the feet of a guru, *murti* or icon of a Deva (God) (such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna). While going to have darshan, a devotee is expected to carry some fruits or flowers or some money as a mark of respect. In ancient times when a student approached a teacher (*rishi*), he was expected to carry pieces of dry wood sticks (*samitpani*) as a mark of humility and submission to discipline. As the rishis lived in forests and performed daily yajnas (fire-sacrifices), carrying wood symbolized the students’ willingness to serve and learn.

The term darshan also means ‘philosophy’, especially in the context of the six systems of thought (*shad darshan*) of Hinduism. Philosophy, in this sense, means ‘seeing’ life or the ultimate reality. A philosopher, hence, is called a *darshnik*, a ‘seer’. □



Uniqueness of Indian Culture

K S SUBRAMANIAM

Culture Means Refining

Gold is available in the bowels of the earth. Metals and oils too are hidden in it. But they are not in a condition for consumption. They are raw, crude and impure. They require to be purified and refined. In other words, they need curing or culturing. Similarly, cultivation is a process to produce grains and fruits. Cooking is a process to make dry grains edible. Butter is a product brought out of a long process called churning of milk.

In the same way, man has God hidden in him. Perfection is latent in him. Love is inherent in him. Knowledge is imbedded in him. Bliss is stored in him. They are all to be brought out through a process called *culture*. Initially, despite the hidden treasure, man is rude, unrefined, uncivilized and uncultured. Over a long period of time, through a process of curing and cultivating (in the form of good *samskaras*) he is able to attain the status of a cultured person of coveted divine traits. As gold is precious, culture is of intrinsic value. As butter cannot be reversed and mixed with milk, buttermilk, curd or water, culture cannot afford to be contaminated with anything. It should not be adulterated. It should remain pure and precious. As metals can be moulded and shaped into tools and ornaments, culture is known to shine with its adaptability in any form of civilization.

Culture and civilization are like gold and ornaments, content and the container. It is culture that is of greater value. Civilization gains in status only when it has the precious culture at its core. The value of the jewel is based on the gold with which it is made. The shape and design of ornaments may not withstand blows, but gold can. Indian culture is unique, for it has withstood many a blow till now. Blows have only brightened it.

Culture and Perfection

The word 'culture' is used to denote the unique and intrinsic talents or traits in their perfected form in a community or country, a society or a nation. Each culture is unique since it reflects the intrinsic character of the respective people. Also, peoples belonging to different cultures develop their arts and sciences, habits and lifestyles reflecting their own cultural traits. In the Indian cultural tradition, we find many such refinements. In music and dance, food and drinks, aptitudes and attires, traditions and customs and a host of life-skills and styles including the goals of life, one finds the perfected form of their respective cultures. For example, in the tribal dances, there is a state of perfection reflecting their tribal culture. Similarly, Carnatic music reveals the perfection of that art in tune with a refined culture. Bharatanatyam, Kathakkali,



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Manipuri, Kuchupudi, Yakshagana and such forms of dance have reached a unique expression of perfection, displaying the cultural traits of the respective areas where they have evolved. To tamper with them is but a vain attempt.

Culture and Civilization

Culture and civilization are like character and conduct. The core of conduct is character and the expression of character is seen in conduct. *What* we are is character; *how* we are is conduct. Even an ordinary behaviour or prosaic nature with sound character is like a gold biscuit with decoration. Preferably, character and conduct should be in tune with each other. Civilization shines in proportion to its intrinsic preciousness of culture. Scarcely should the civilization be contrary to culture. Character should always be unchanging, in tune with the intrinsic divinity of man. Civilizations, now and then, may undergo a few changes but without affecting the essential cultural moorings—that is the true test of a well-developed culture. In India, in spite of foreign invasions and reigns and the advent of their styles of living, the core values of its culture have remained untouched.

Of course, there have been some changes in the civilization, in the externals. In dress, in language and in a few habits one may find changes in Indian civic expressions due to globalization. But at the core, India retains its unique culture. Though India has had its share of influence of Western civilization, the core character of Indian culture remains the same. For instance, Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramana lived during the British rule in India. They

were least affected and they retained their precious gold-like divine culture. Neither the foreign language nor a material lifestyle had affected the national culture in India in general and Indian spirituality in particular. English language was used for presenting Indian culture much more beautifully by stalwarts like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. The all-embracing nature of Indian culture became well-known and better understood through it.

Culture, in the sense of refinement, remains constant despite the diverse expressions of civilization as gold continues to be the same pure gold in spite of its expressions in various ornaments. Also, Indian culture, like the ocean which remains unaffected by the inflow of many rivers, remains the same in spite of the various civilizations flowing into it. Since Indian culture is divine in content and outlook, it considers everything and everybody as God. Every visitor is a guest and every guest is God. It is again Indian culture to deify all including the elements of Nature. Everybody deserves to be worshipped, according to Indians. Hospitality is to be showered on every visitor. Showing hospitality is culture; the 'how' of that hospitality is civilization. A few hundred years ago, a guest might have been shown hospitality in one way and now in a different way. If milk was given to the guest long ago, it may be coffee or some other drink now. Whatever may be offered, it is to be done with a holy attitude. To a truly cultured Indian everything is a divine act and everybody is a divine being.

Conquest of Nature

Nature may be viewed in two ways: The external nature consisting of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and space; and the internal nature consisting of the three Gunas (the Tamasik or idleness, Rajasik or dynamism and Sattvik or serenity) in the mind. [Of course, Vedanta speaks of all Nature to be an expression of three Gunas but for the sake of understanding culture, let us assume to look at nature in these two ways.]

For a comfortable physical well-being, external nature is to be balanced. For a peaceful life, internal nature is to be poised, composed or balanced. If external nature is conquered without the internal conquest, it will be a lopsided achievement. We have external comfort and internal restlessness!

If external conquest is construed as civilization, internal conquest is culture. In the Ramayana, Ravana was able to command the five elements of Nature. He subdued them and built civilized society in his kingdom where the five elements of Nature, represented by various powerful men built a gorgeous Lanka. In scorching summer, Ravana was able to enjoy the cool breeze and the pleasant moon in his bedroom. But in spite of all his achievements in the external world, he was not peaceful at heart. He was often disturbed and agitated in the mind because of his lust. It was a clear indication that he was unable to control his mind or internal nature. Despite a flourishing civilization, he was deprived of restful sleep.

It is culture that brings peace. When the internal nature is controlled or

conquered, external nature too can be enjoyed meaningfully. Indian culture advocates and practises conquest of internal nature. The rishis and yogis of this country gave priority to the conquest of the internal nature or mind. This conquest of the internal nature is able to make man in India contented, accommodative and loving in outlook. Hence the basic propensity of the Indian mind is to live in tune with Nature and not interfere with it. In other words, when the mind is controlled, it is at rest. And such restful mind can live in tune with Nature. Therefore, India did not crave for external conquest. Indian culture is unique in the sense that it turns the mind inward and makes life lovable, live-able and peaceful under all circumstances, fluctuations of fortune and vagaries of nature. India recognised long back the need to respect, and not exploit, Nature. Nature should be used and not abused. Today we see how environmental pollution, sound pollution and visual pollution have collectively made our lives so difficult.

Magnanimous and Modest

Swami Vivekananda is of the view that modern civilization touches only the surface of human life. He said (CW, 3.291)

We all know in modern times of nations which have masses of knowledge, but what of them? They are like tigers, they are like savages, because culture is not there. Knowledge is only skin-deep, as civilisation is, and a little scratch brings out the old savage.

Yes, scratch a little, the beast pounces up. Such was the kingdom of Ravana; there was plenty of civilization such as well-ventilated rooms, splendid buildings and gardens and

so on—all signs of civilization. [Now use of computers is held as the sign of growth!] Despite the devices, man may not have



peace of mind like the demonic Ravana. Civilization without culture is like a monkey or a donkey with decorative costumes and ornaments. Culture without civilization may be like a majestic lion of courage and a mighty elephant of strength without any ornaments. They need no ornaments. And monkeys and donkeys cannot improve their traits in spite of the jewellery. Therefore, adherence

to intrinsic divinity is more important than transient trappings.

Recognising the innate divinity as basis of all-embracing love and modesty is the hall mark of Indian culture. This brings in magnanimity and majesty in life. Thus we find in the Ramayana, Sri Rama as an embodiment of magnanimity and modesty. When Ahalya was brought back to normalcy by the grace of Sri Rama, she extolled him in glowing terms. But Sri Rama, the embodiment of true spirit of Indian culture, maintained his modesty and replied,

O Mother please do not attribute any healing powers to me or redeeming features to my toes. I am an ordinary man with normal abilities. If my feet had the ability to transform stones into women, all the pebbles that came in contact

with my soles should have become women by now. I came all the way walking from Ayodhya. No stone elsewhere was transformed into a lady. You have been in a stone-like state of stoicism with prayers all these years. It is but a coincidence that my toes came in contact with you at the time of your fulfilment. I am but an instrument fulfilling a task assigned to me by the providence.

This is typical of Indian culture. Performing one's duties with commitment but without attachment is the characteristic trait of an advanced culture.

Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata is considered to be a great God. At the time of Yudhishtira's Rajasuya yajna in Indraprastha, Sri Krishna is offered to be the chief guest and accordingly he goes forward to worship Sri Krishna's feet. Shishupala, a cousin of Sri Krishna, objects to this. Then Yudhishtira explains how Sri Krishna deserves to be the chief guest. He says that it was Sri Krishna who received every visitor as not only a guest but a God. He welcomed all and honoured all. Therefore, he deserves to be respected by all. He, who loves all, deserves to be loved by all. He, who respects all, deserves to be respected by all. He, who worships all, deserves to be worshipped by all.

The uniqueness of Indian culture lies in the fact that it is based on divinity of man. This means respecting and loving all. Its innate spirituality is its uniqueness. □



Indian Languages— the Cradle of Indian Culture

The rich literary tradition of Indian Culture has been nurtured over the ages through numerous languages spoken in India. They are a treasure-house of stories, folk lore, beliefs, practices, history, life-style details, dance, drama and other aspects of the culture.

Indian languages belong to several language families, the major ones being the Indo-Aryan languages (a branch of Indo-European) spoken by 74% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 24% of Indians. Other

the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-

families and isolates. The Schedule of the Indian referred to as the

According to languages are spoken speakers, 122 by more languages that have in the history of India government of India has official language.

There is no consensus the modern north Indian languages Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sindhi and Oriya emerged, but AD 1000 is commonly accepted. Each language had different influences, with Hindi-Urdu (Hindustani) being strongly influenced by Persian.

The Dravidian languages of South India had a history independent of Sanskrit. The major Dravidian languages are Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu. A good percentage of the vocabulary used in Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada is borrowed from Sanskrit. The Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages of North-East India have long independent histories.

Most languages in the Indian republic are written in Brahmi-derived scripts, such as Devanagari, Kannada, Eastern Nagari-Assamese/Bengali, Telugu, Oriya, Tamil, etc., though Urdu is written in an Arabic script, and a few minor languages such as Santhali use independent scripts.

In 2004, the Government of India declared that languages that met certain requirements could be accorded the status of a 'Classical Language in India'. Languages thus far declared to be Classical are Tamil (in 2004), Sanskrit (in 2005), Kannada and Telugu (in 2008).

Besides, India has hundreds of active dialects in use. These have contributed to the development and sustenance of a syncretic cultural ethos that have withstood the test of times. □

languages spoken in India belong to Burman, and a few minor language languages listed in the Eighth constitution are sometimes national languages of India.

2001 Census of India, 30 by more than a million native than 10,000. Two contact played an important role are Persian and English. The given 22 languages the status of

about the specific time and place such as Hindi-Urdu, Assamese, Bengali,

What Man Wants

An Elucidation of Indian Culture in Light of Four Purusharthas

N GOKULMUTHU

First Three Goals of Life

The ambitions and goals of each person seem to be unique. Different people are in different situations in life and want different things at different times. However, if one asks the question, 'Why do you want that?', recursively, finally it will come to one of the three general pursuits—security, happiness and peace.

A labourer may be working hard in the field. A thief may be committing a theft. A sportsperson may be trying to surpass his own previous record. A person may be donating money to a charity. A mother may be coaxing her child to eat one more morsel of food. If we ask the question, 'Why?' to these people, they may give a reply like, 'I want to earn money', 'I want to become famous', or 'I want my child to be healthy', etc. If we again ask, 'Why?' to these questions, we may get another reply. If we keep on asking, 'Why?', finally the answer will boil down to security, happiness and peace of the person. Even the health of the child would be finally for the happiness of the mother.

This is true not only for human beings. This is true for all living beings. All creatures are looking for only these three—security, happiness and peace. These are represented

by the first three goals of life as defined by the Vedas—*artha*, *kama* and *dharma*.

We want to survive. This sense of security is called *artha*. This includes all that we consider that supports our survival—money, house, food, children, insurance, police, etc.

Beyond the basic survival, we want to lead a happy and comfortable life. This sense of happiness is called *kama*. The regulations to my pursuit and indulgence in *artha* and *kama* so that it is sustainable is called *dharma*. Our current pursuit of *artha* and *kama* should not jeopardize our future prospects of *artha* and *kama*. Also, our pursuit should not deny another person of his reasonable share of *artha* and *kama*. Thus *dharma* consists of the do's and don'ts for sustained availability of *artha* and *kama* for everyone in this and future births. *Dharma* includes values like truthfulness (*satya*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), purity (*brahmacharya*), non-covetousness (*asteya*) and avoidance of over-consumption (*aparigraha*).

The Fourth and the Highest Goal

If we ask, 'When do we want to be secure, happy or peaceful? Today or tomorrow? Monday or Tuesday? Morning or evening?', the answer is, 'Always.' If we ask,

□ A devotee of the Lord, Gokulmuthu N. works as a software engineer in Bangalore.

'Where? At home or on the road? In Chennai or Mumbai?', the answer is, 'Everywhere.' If we ask, 'Under what conditions? When we get what we want or when we do not? When we are successful or when we face failure?', the answer is, 'Under all conditions.' Thus, we want to be secure, happy and peaceful always, everywhere and under all conditions. Thus, we want these free from all kinds of limitations of space, time and causation.

Now, the Veda makes a very important and logical comment: '*naasti akritah kritena*'—'an unconditional entity cannot be the product of a process'.¹ It also declares, '*yo vai bhuma tat sukham na alpe sukham asti*'—'satisfaction is only in the infinite, not in the finite'.² Thus, our pursuit after security, happiness and peace, by doing various things and acquiring people and objects around us, is a futile one. We can never get unconditional security, happiness and peace, and we can never be satisfied with whatever we get. The Veda says, '*na vittena tarpaniyo manushyaha*'—'man is not satisfied by any amount of wealth'.³ This can be extended to the other two goals also.

So, the entire human pursuit seems to be futile. At this juncture, the Veda again extends a saving hand towards us and shows us that unconditional security, happiness and peace are the very essential nature of our being. We need not search for it anywhere. It is already mine. Thus, all that is needed is the knowledge of our real nature, which is obtained by a systematic study of the Vedantic scriptures under a competent teacher. When this knowledge is attained, we no longer seek security, happiness and peace outside. We are totally fulfilled. The Veda says, '*so ashnute sarvaan kamaan saha*'—'He enjoys the happiness of everything together'.⁴ This puts an end to all sorrow. The Veda says, '*tarati shokam aatmavid*'—'One who knows his own

true nature goes beyond all sorrow'.⁵ This freedom from all sense of unfulfillment is the fourth goal, '*moksha*'. This is attained by right understanding. The Veda says, '*vidyaya vindate amrutam*'—'fulfillment is attained by knowledge'.⁶

However, to attain the conviction that worldly pursuits will not give us what we are looking for, we need to try our hands on it. Thus, the Veda recommends the beginner to pursue all the four goals:

dharmaa na pramaditavyam.

kushalaa na pramaditavyam.

bhutyay na pramaditavyam.

svaadhyaya pravachaabhyasa na pramaditavyam

Do not ignore dharma.

Do not ignore security.

Do not ignore prosperity.

Do not ignore study and discussion of Vedantic scriptures.⁷

However, the Veda asks the person to be introspective to evaluate the result-worthiness of the pursuit: '*pariikshya lokaan karma citaan braahmano nirvedam aayaat naasti akritah kritena*'—'By experimenting with the world by doing various actions (in pursuit of unconditional security, happiness and peace) a thinking person will develop renunciation by coming to the understanding that an unconditional result cannot be attained by means of a process'.⁸

This beautiful combination of pursuit after development (*pravritti marga*, extroverted way) and a later renunciation of the value attributed to development (*nivritti marga*, introverted way) is the essence of Indian culture. In the crisp introduction to his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Adi Sankaracharya brings this out very nicely. The pursuit of artha and kama when done by us following dharma will yield prosperity (abhyudaya) to us and to the society. This will

also purify our mind by reducing the strong likes and dislikes, which will result in *vairagya*, renunciation, which is the understanding that complete fulfilment cannot be obtained by external pursuits. This will make us turn towards the inner pursuit, which will give us the fulfilment (*nishshreyasa*) that we had been seeking all through.

A Goal-based Classification of People

Based on the pursuit one follows, the Gita classifies people into five categories.⁹

1. *dushkritinah*: People who do not follow dharma. They ignore the law of karma that they will have to face the consequences of their actions later in this or future life. So they do not follow values in their pursuit of artha and kama.

2. *aarta*: People who pursue security within the confines of dharma.

3. *artharthi*: People who pursue comfort within the confines of dharma

4. *jijnasu*: People who have realized that external pursuit will not lead to fulfillment. They pursue knowledge about the true nature of the Self as the means to fulfillment.

5. *jnani*: People who have attained the knowledge, and thus, are fulfilled.

Gita calls the people of the categories (2), (3), (4) and (5) as *sukritinah*, righteous people. Thus, our culture does not forbid the pursuit of artha and kama. In fact, when enumerating His own glories, Krishna says, '*bhuteshu dharmaviruddhah kaamah asmi*'—'In all beings, I am the desire that does not violate dharma'.¹⁰ Gita exhorts people to perform their duties, give in charity and live a life of values, because these will purify the mind.¹¹

When Arjuna sees the Cosmic Form (*vishwarupa darshana*) of the Lord, he describes the reaction of these various types of people towards the Lord.¹² The people of category

(1) are afraid of the Lord and try to run in all directions vainly trying to escape. The people of category (2), (3) and (4) are delighted by the Lord and worship the Lord as the provider of security, comfort and knowledge, respectively. The people of category (5), who are fulfilled already and need nothing, simply bow down to the Lord in reverence and gratitude.

However, the Gita expects that people do not get stuck in (2) and (3) forever, and move to (4). The Gita says that by attaining the last goal of moksha resulting from right understanding, the other three—artha, kama and dharma—is attained automatically.¹³ So, though the initial parts of the Veda promote artha, kama and dharma, the aspirant should get over them and move on.¹⁴

The Gita says that for people who are yet to come to a conviction of the futility of the external pursuit, pursuing wealth and comfort within the confines of dharma is the way. For people who have this conviction, an introverted life in pursuit of this knowledge is the way.¹⁵ They should give up the external pursuits of artha, kama and dharma, and resort to the inner pursuit of moksha.¹⁶ Gita makes it very clear that the pursuit which begins with extroverted action attains its fulfilment only when the knowledge of one's own true nature is attained by turning to the inner pursuit.¹⁷

Modern Social Implications of the Goals

Right understanding and implementation of the four goals will lead to a happy and sustainable human society.

Dharma is the basis of human society. Animal societies follow the *matsya nyaya* [the simile of fish], where the strong eats or marginalizes the weak. This is called popularly as 'survival of the fittest'. Human

societies give place for every individual to express his abilities, experience the world and develop internally by that. This is ensured by dharma.

Dharma is based on the law of karma. The basic assumption is that we have a freewill. In any given situation, after getting the external inputs from the sense organs, emotional preferences from the mind, reminder of past experiences from the memory and analysis of the various options by the intellect, we decide the action. We cannot decide if Nature is random. Our decision is based on the assumption that there is a clear cause-effect relationship in Nature. The consequences of our action are based on our action. We are responsible for the consequences and we should face the consequences sooner or later. Every situation that we face in life is based on our past exercise of freewill. We are alone responsible for the situation that we are in. Everything we do will come back to us. From this comes the Golden Rule: we should not do to others what we do not want others to do to us. We should do to others what we want others to do to us.¹⁸ We should restrain and regulate our pursuit and indulgence of wealth and comforts within the boundaries of dharma.

Any pursuit of wealth and comforts which does not confine to dharma is against human society. Human society cannot function without dharma. Even if only we sit inside a building it assumes that all the people involved in the construction of the house like the cement, steel and brick manufacturers,

architect, structural engineer, mason, electrician and plumber have done their respective jobs following dharma. Without that faith, we cannot safely and peacefully sit in the building. Without the assumption that people follow dharma, no one can live a normal life.

The over-consumption in today's society is because of the lack of sufficient balancing force of nivritti marga against pravritti marga. The consumption based economy makes people to believe that fulfillment will come from development. Because of this people are evaluated based on possessions. Instead of the jnani being considered as the pinnacle of human civilization, the artha or artharthi is considered as the ideal. This makes people to give more importance to material development. Even education is focused mainly to enhance the student's capability to accumulate wealth. This false propaganda that fulfillment will come from development is the root cause of various modern social ills like economic disparity, exploitation of poor people, degeneration of the environment, lack of moral values, rampant corruption, breakage of family system, etc.

Conclusion

To make the world a place which can sustain the growing human population, it is vital to understand and propagate the beautiful concept about the goal of human life as presented in the Veda and Gita. This is a unique and vital contribution of Indian Culture to the world. The world needs this now more than ever before. □

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India's Traditional Clothing

India is a land of colourful attires. The recorded history of clothing in India goes back to the 5th millennium BC in the Indus valley civilisation where cotton was spun, woven and dyed. The cotton industry in ancient India was well developed, and several of the methods survive until today.

Clothing in India varies from region to region depending on the ethnicity, geography, climate and cultural traditions of the people of that region. There is great diversity in terms of weaving, fibres, colours and material of clothing. Colour codes are followed in clothing based on the religion and ritual concerned. For instance, Hindus wear white clothes to indicate mourning while Parsis and Christians wear white to weddings.

Here are some samples of the popular Indian attires:

Dhoti, a six feet long white strip of cotton, ornamental or a flat and simple one, held in place with the help of a knot of a belt around the waist is worn by men. In south India men wear long, white sarong like sheets of cloth known as Mundu. In north and central Indian languages like Hindi, Marathi and Oriya, these are called dhoti, while in Telugu they are called Pancha, in Tamil they are called veshti and in Kannada it is called Panche/Lungi. Over the dhoti, men wear chaddar or shirts.

Salwar kameez, a women's wear, is the traditional wear of women in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. It has gained popularity in other parts of India.

Ghagra Choli or Lehenga Choli is the traditional clothing of women in Rajasthan and Gujarat and parts of Punjab and Harayana. It consists of long skirt-like garment for covering the lower half of the body.

Pattu Pavadai or Langa davani is a traditional dress in south India, usually worn by teenage and small girls. The pavada is a cone-shaped garment, usually of silk, that hangs down from the waist to the toes. It normally has a golden border at the bottom.

Saree or sari, a women's wear, is a long unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine metres in length that is draped over the body in various styles. There are various traditional styles of saree such as Sambalpuri Saree from East, Kanchipuram from South, Paithani from West and Banarasi from North among others.

Turbans

Besides, men wear turban either daily or on special occasions. These are worn in many regions in the country, incorporating various styles and designs depending on the place. Many types of headgear such as Pagri, Taqiyah and Gandhi cap are worn by different communities



South Indian veshti (dhoti)

within the country to signify a common ideology or interest. Turbans in Rajasthan are called pagri. They are distinctive in style and colour, and indicate the caste, social class and region of the wearer.

Pheta is the Marathi name for turbans worn in Maharashtra. It's usually worn during traditional ceremonies and occasions.

Mysore Peta was originally worn by the kings of Mysore during formal meeting in durbar and in ceremonial processions during festivals, and meeting with dignitaries.

Western clothing made its foray into the Indian society during the British Raj. Later a good number of Indians adopted western clothing due to its relative comfort or due to regulations set then. By the turn of this century, both western and Indian clothing have intermingled creating a unique style of clothing for the typical urban Indian population. □



A type of Rajasthani Pagri

In every country the respectability of a person is determined, to a certain extent, by the nature of the dress he wears. . . . In a hot climate, the necessity of clothes is not so much felt. A mere Kaupin is enough for the purpose of decency; other clothes serve more as embellishments. In cold countries, as a matter of unavoidable necessity, the people, when uncivilised, clothe themselves with the skins of animals, and when they gradually become civilised, they learn the use of blankets, and by degrees, shaped dresses, such as pantaloons, coats, and so on. Of course it is impossible in cold countries to display the beauty of ornaments, which have to be worn on the bare body, for if they did so they would suffer severely from cold. So the fondness for ornaments is transferred to, and is satisfied by, the niceties of dress. As in India the fashions in ornaments change very often, so in the West the fashions in dress change every moment.

—**Swami Vivekananda**, CW, 5:506



Swamiji wearing traditional Rajasthani Pagri—World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, USA, 1893

By giving up one's national costume and ways of eating and living, one gets denationalised. One can learn from all, but that learning which leads to denationalisation does not help one's uplift but becomes the cause of degradation.

—**Swami Vivekananda**, CW, 7: 265

Connecting the Dots

A Syncretic View of the Caste System

SHEENU SRINIVASAN

The First Dot

Watch a typical Hindu family rush forward to greet a guru or a swami and touch his/her feet. Some even wash the guru's feet. Why? Because from times immemorial Hindus have chanted the well-known verse in praise of a guru:

*Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu
Gurur Devo Maheshwarah,
Guruh Sakshat Parabrahma
Tasmai Shri Gurave Namah.*

Salutations to the preceptor who is verily Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and who personifies the Supreme Being.

According to Hindu tradition, the guru is verily Brahman. And touching the feet of gurus and elders is not only a mark of respect but also a very satisfying action for most Hindus. But why the feet? Why not a kiss on the cheeks? Why not a hug? Never! So worshipping the feet, prostrating at the feet is authorized by tradition. So for the Hindus feet are as no less important than their head. *This is the first dot.*

The Second Dot

In the Rig Veda the infinite embodied spirit (the supreme Purusha) is described and it states that the Brahmin (men of learning) issued from his face (head; thought centre),

the Kshatriya (warriors) from his arms (power of protection), the Vaishya (traders) from his thighs (power of acquisition and distribution) and the shudra (service-oriented men) issued from his feet (power of support and movement).

A major misinterpretation of this metaphor is that the placement of shudra at the feet somehow dictates hierarchy and thus we are now on the proverbial slippery slope. You can see where this leads: superior and inferior class in a society. A positive interpretation would be to accept the fact that no part of a body is inferior to any other part and that each has a clear and distinct function much like the large variety of instruments in an orchestra. Successful functioning of the body therefore demands that all parts perform their 'assigned' functions efficiently and harmoniously. *This is the second dot.*

The Third Dot

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declared (13.4)

*chatur varnyam maya srstam guna karma
vibhagashah:*

I have created four categories of people in order to distinguish their nature and functions.

No other verse has created more havoc than this one in Hindu society! People



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who wish to divide a society may argue that this establishes a scheme to discriminate among people. The actual categories do not get discussed until the last chapter of the Gita. The four categories are really functions that need to be performed or responsibilities that need to be borne by citizens in any society. These categories were called Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras respectively. They are broadly classified as (a) gatekeepers of knowledge, (b) keepers of security and well-being (c) managers of agribusiness, trade and commerce and finally (d) providers of service and care to others.

Let us take the first category i.e. brahmins. They were called brahmins because their single most important assignment was to strive towards understanding the absolute truth, i.e. Brahman. It required a certain level of intellect, certain level of objectivity, certain level of tenacity to adhere to truth. It implied a certain level of responsibility to their fellow beings. In short, these were brilliant people with a heart who had an intimate connection with society and helped reform society, playing the role of teachers. This is precisely the reason why the well-known prayer says:

brahmanah santu nirbhayah

May brahmins be fearless.

Why did not the entire society devote itself to this noble cause? A naive and theoretical question, but it can still be answered. First of all, if you examine the question, there are some built-in but wrong assumptions. It presumes that all members

of a society have not only a similar and simultaneous interest in the type of studies implied earlier, but more important

they all have the requisite talents to engage themselves in that task. Secondly there is an implication that this is indeed the only noble task. Both assumptions are incorrect. In practice individuals have different talents and interests. Furthermore there are other tasks equally challenging and equally noble that a society needs to undertake for a uniform, wholesome development of society. In fact, it is in society's interest that there are people with different interests and talents and it is best if each individual had the scope to reach his/her heights in sharpening those skills and contributing the very best in the specific areas of their calling.

So in formulating the total work that need to be performed, ancient societies provided certain opportunities and defined certain responsibilities to their members. Clearly, they needed a group of people who had the requisite talents to protect society from external aggression or internal strife. So that group specialized in the science of arms, ammunition, strategies, tactics of warfare, etc. This specific group was called

Kshatriyas. Then the society required people who specialized in agribusiness, trade and commerce to procure goods and services so that the society as a whole can lead a life of plenty and enjoy the good life. This group was categorized as Vaishyas.

The first three of the four varnas allowed specificity because they involve unique requirements. If we agree that the first three functions demand focus, concentration, studies, dedication and total immersion, then a legitimate question arises. Who takes care of the many other needs of these folks? Who toils to make sure they are fed, clothed, sheltered and attends to a wide variety of daily tasks typical of any household? Who works in their fields, their homes, kitchens, baths, etc.?

Now we are defining the need for a service function; a class of people who make their livelihood serving others. Think of thousands, no, millions indeed, who work day and night serving others for remuneration. Who or what does this category *not* include? It does include doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants, . . . The list of Shudras is almost endless and must include those who toil at restaurants, hospitals, banks, public and private buildings. Thousands of young men and women who serve us with a smile at resorts and restaurants keeping rooms and tables clean are indeed performing the duties of a Shudra. Will the latter stay in that profession throughout their life? May be or may be not. As long as that decision is theirs, and theirs alone, and as long as there is no stigma attached to it and as long as they can live the life acceptable to them, there should be no problem.

The problem arises only when they are dubbed as 'low class' and that opportunities for them to consider other options are denied.

This whole system is not a strange or crazy arrangement. If you think about it, this system is alive and well, with appropriate variations, in every corporation, in every household, in every government and even in civic, religious and political groups. There is no inherent problem with it. It is a practical reality. The system simply recognizes various needs of an organization and assigns people to perform the corresponding tasks. *This then is the third dot.*

The Fourth Dot

The metaphor for the division into four principal groups is the human body with its head, arms, trunk and legs. The system described is similar and bound together by ties of common fellowship much the same way the different parts of the body are bound together into one whole. So what is the problem? The problem is that the system was dubbed 'the caste system' and there was a stigma attached to that description because of some serious misinterpretations and improper perceptions. One such perception is based on an unfounded belief that somehow some tasks are more important than others. Another somewhat more serious perception was about social mobility. Social mobility or rather lack of it meant, according to this perception, that once a person is committed to a group and its task, that person can never move to another group and task and take on a new responsibility.

One can emphatically state that these perceptions have no basis and are not realistic. However they have caused a major havoc in Hindu society and therefore the obvious thing happened. Instead of trying to understand its original intent of shared obligation and responsibility by all sections of society, the national debate shifted its emphasis to 'correct' the so-called imbalance. As a result, not only

Brahmins and therefore their tasks suffered but the other groups have too and what we have is a major headache with group-ism, exploitation and senseless rivalry.

Therefore, the original intent is now lost. That intent provided an opportunity for individuals to excel in what they can do well, reach new heights keeping in mind that they could shift in either direction and take on tasks and responsibilities that are the domain of another group if they have the interest and talents to do so. That is their birthright and no force on earth should be able to prevent them. In Chapter 18 of the Gita, there are references to this that may cause confusion unless we keep in mind the context. Krishna's thesis is that maximizing one's natural abilities is the best for individuals and society. *This then is the fourth dot.*

The Fifth Dot

Before we look critically at one or another task we must understand some ground rules. For example, let us examine what a Brahmin is? What does it really take to be a Brahmin? In fact that question was put in Mahabharata to Yudhishtira by the Yaksha.¹ Listen to the Yaksha and Yudhishtira.

*rajan kulena vrttena svadhyayena srutena va
brahmanyam kenabhavati prabruhyetatsu niscitam*

King, how does one become a Brahmin: by birth? Character? Study of the Vedas? Education? Tell me precisely.

*shrnu yaksa kulam tata nasvadhyayo nacasrutam
karanam hi doijatve ca vruttameva na samsayaha*

Listen, Yaksha, it is neither birth nor education, nor even the study of the Vedas. Without doubt, it is character alone that marks a Brahmin.²

Yudhishtira's answer is crisp, clear and unambiguous when he replies, '*na samshayaha*—there is no doubt about it: it is not birth, it is

not education, it is not the study of the Vedas but it is *vritta* (character) alone that determines a Brahmin.'

So the basic problem that has messed us up over centuries is that we have conditioned ourselves to make an immediate connection between birth and caste. This is in spite of the authority of no less a person than the noble king Yudhishtira. If we somehow train ourselves to make the connection between a human being and what he/she *does* we shall have no problem, at least in a practical context, in looking upon an Ambedkar as a brahmin when he wrote the constitution of India and Rajendra Prasad or a Kamraj Nadar as Kshatriyas.

What is Yudhishtira's definition of character? He has already answered the question in a previous passage in the Mahabharata, the dialogue with King Nahusha:

He is known as a Brahmin . . . in whom truthfulness, liberality, patience, deportment, mildness, self-control, and compassion are found. And he may gain knowledge of the Supreme Brahman, beyond happiness and unhappiness . . . on reaching which they grieve no more.

The long list of attributes may be looked upon as components of character.

This inquiry and answer ought to be adequate to clear the great disagreement in regard to heredity. But more recently, Swami Vivekananda in his lecture on 'The Mission of the Vedanta' declares,

Our ideal is the Brahmin of the spiritual culture and renunciation . . . I mean the Brahmin idealness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race.³

That is the reason why, in ancient India, the greatest princes sought to trace their

descent to some ancient sage who dressed in a bit of loin-cloth, lived in a forest, eating roots and studying the Vedas. It is there that the Indian princes went to trace their ancestry. Their satisfaction was immense if they could discover that their ancestor was 'devoid of worldliness and possessed true wisdom.' So if one desires to be a Brahmin, by all means one can do so if he/she can satisfy the stringent requirements ('Brahmin ideal-ness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present' and 'in whom truthfulness, liberality, patience, deportment, mildness, self-control, and compassion are found') and that has nothing to do with who one is born to and what one's ancestor's occupation may have been. *This is the fifth dot.*

The Sixth Dot

The four functions may not be equal by some measures and similarly the 'qualifications' are not the same. But what is same is they are all *svabhava* i.e. born of one's own nature. Their approaches are different but they are all tasks that need to be performed by societies to keep it functioning at their best.

The fact of the matter is that during the course of a day, your thought processes, your actions, your words may classify you as a Brahmin (however briefly), later a Kshatriya or a Shudra and/or a Vaishya. Thus all of us, in a way, have all the four varnas integral to our being. Of course one or the other aspect

reflecting a particular *varna* [literally, 'colour', in this context, 'class'] may predominate at certain times directing our particular action at those times. That, if you observe yourself carefully, is life. *That is the sixth dot.*

Conclusion

In summary, let us look at the dots.

1. In a body, a metaphor for a smooth functioning society, we do not consider feet to be inferior to the head.

2. All parts of a body are essential for a successful functioning of the body.

3. In any society there are at least four major categories/functions/tasks that need to be shouldered by its citizenry. Matching talent to task is the ideal sought.

4. Each function has its requirements, approach and prerequisite talents and it is in the interest of a society that individuals performing such functions maximize their skills.

5. Heredity has no bearing on the function.

6. Each one of us, during the course of a day, undertakes a number of tasks that may include all the four major categories.

Connect all these dots and we see its practical sense. We will also see a system that was created to work. It does work as long as we take the taboo out of the equation. So connect all dots and get on with your task of serving society matching your talent to your task. □



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Dara Shikoh

The Mughal Prince Who Translated the Upanishads into Persian

Dara Shikoh, the Shahzada of the Mughal Empire, was the eldest son of Mughal King, Shah Jahan. He is known for his translation of the Upanishads into Persian.

He was favoured as a successor by his father and his sister Princess Jahanara Begum Sahib, but was defeated by his younger brother Prince Muhiuddin (later the Emperor Aurangzeb) in a bitter struggle for the imperial throne.

Dara was born near Ajmer in 1615 and was married in 1633. As was common for all Mughal sons, Dara was appointed a military commander at an early age. In 1642, Shah Jahan formally confirmed Dara as his heir. But in 1657 the illness of emperor Shah Jahan triggered a desperate struggle for power among the four Mughal princes. After a year of bitter struggle, Dara was defeated by Aurangzeb and Murad and was brutally assassinated. Subsequently Aurangzeb took over reins of the Mughal Empire.

Dara Shikoh is widely renowned as an enlightened prince of the harmonious coexistence. He was an erudite champion of mystical tradition of Islam and Hinduism. He was a follower of Lahore's famous Qadiri Sufi saint Hazrat Mian Mir.

Dara subsequently developed a friendship with the seventh Sikh Guru, Guru Har Rai. He devoted much effort towards finding a common mystical language between Islam and Hinduism. He heard about the Upanishads while in Kashmir in 1640 and was inspired to translate them. Towards this goal he completed the translation of 50 Upanishads from its original Sanskrit into Persian in 1657. His works were edited by pundits from Benares living in Delhi. He wanted that the message of the Upanishads should reach Muslim scholars. His translation is called *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Greatest Mystery). His most famous work, *Majma-ul-Bahrain* ('The Confluence of the Two Seas'), was also devoted to a revelation of the mystical and pluralistic affinities between Sufi and Vedantic speculation.

Dara Shikoh also established a library (in Delhi, now run as a museum by Archeological Survey of India) and was also a patron of fine arts, music and dance. Many of his paintings are quite detailed and compare well to a professional artist of his time. He is also credited with the commissioning of several exquisite, still extant, examples of Mughal architecture.

Dara Shikoh was a quintessential liberal thinker. In recent times, he has been a subject of many books, novels and plays. □



Why Be Proud of Being an Indian?

Twelve Major Achievements of Indian Civilization

MICHEL DANINO

Patriotism versus National Pride

We all wish young Indians to be proud of belonging to this nation, and, indeed, if asked, most of them loudly assert a sense of pride. But there is some confusion between pride and patriotism: cheering the national cricket team is a sign of patriotism, not pride. Patriotism is a universally shared feeling, but there is no guarantee that it is bound to be a positive one: Germans under Nazi Germany or the Japanese during World War II were highly patriotic—with the consequences we know. Patriotism is rooted in the national ego (hence its aggressive nature) and, generally, in ignorance; at bottom, it is little better than the animal's pack instinct. National pride, on the other hand, is—or at least can be—a positive

feeling founded on knowledge: an awareness of one's country best achievements and highest contributions to humanity. It is rooted in the soul of the nation, not its ego.

In India's case, the picture is complicated by the fact that India is more than a nation in the modern sense of the word: it is a civilization and it is in this perspective that we must assess her 'civilizational balance sheet'.

In what follows, there is no attempt to glorify India. No one can be happy

with the knowledge that fifteen Indians commit suicide every hour, or that nearly three lakh Indian farmers have killed themselves in the last two decades. India perhaps holds a world record in terms of the numbers of female



Author's footnote: French-born Michel Danino has been living in India since 1977. A long-time student of India's protohistory, he has contributed books and papers in English and French on issues related to the origins of Indian civilization. His recent works are *The Lost River: On the Trail of the Sarasvati* (Penguin Books India, 2010); *Indian Culture and India's Future* (DK Printworld, 2011), and *The Dawn of Indian Civilization and the Elusive Aryans* (forthcoming). He is currently guest professor at IIT Gandhinagar and visiting faculty at IIM Ranchi. This article is based on a lecture on the same theme delivered at IIT-Madras on 1st April 2012 at a symposium on the Spirit of Indian Heritage organized by the Vivekananda Study Circle as part of celebrations of 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. □



foetuses aborted every year (about five lakhs). According to Interpol, 'In South Asia, the "black" or parallel economy is 30 percent–50 percent of the "white" or documented economy.' Figures apart, we all agree that the levels of civic consciousness and ecological awareness are appallingly low. National pride cannot be blind to those dark spots, but they do not in themselves negate a sober assessment of India's major achievements. In fact, the latter may help find solutions to the former.

Twelve Major Achievements

1. Indus-Sarasvati Civilization

Let us, then, begin our journey through time—and there is no better place to start from than the Indus, or Harappan, or Indus-Sarasvati Civilization. At its peak (from 2600 to 1900 BCE), it extended over one million square kilometres, gave rise to planned cities with an advanced sanitation system, bathrooms for most inhabitants, standardized weights, brick proportions and writing system, and a high civic order.

The Harappans were skilled craftsmen who exported their goods all the way to Mesopotamia, but they perhaps also practised an early form of yoga and meditation, as evidenced by seals and figurines. Their sacred symbols and iconography—from the swastika to yogic postures and the namaste with folded hands—formed a rich legacy which has endured to this day. Although their rulers were not depicted, they effectively integrated the whole of northwest India and today's Pakistan without the use of military force, and created a fairly prosperous and generally peaceful society. It may have been a less flamboyant civilization than the Egypt of the Pharaohs, but its achievements were nonetheless of a high order.

2. Democratic Structures and Concepts

The next stage of India's urbanization—the Ganges civilization of the first millennium BCE—saw the rise not only of kingdoms, but also of democratic structures and concepts. The sixteen Mahajanapadas of Buddhist times

functioned effectively with an elected, not hereditary, king and a system of assemblies. Although kingship did become hereditary later, those democratic traditions, which extended to self-governing villages, remained embedded in the Indian mind. In the last analysis, they were based on a one-word unwritten constitution: not on rights, but on dharma—the individual, social and cosmic order which bound the rulers to the ruled and limited abuse of power: absolute monarchy was an unknown concept in pre-medieval India. 'It is especially remarkable,' writes the Canadian historian Steve





Muhlberger, 'that, during the near-millennium between 500 B.C. and 400 A.D., we find republics almost anywhere in India that our sources allow us to examine society in any detail.' Even later, inscriptions give us elaborate details on the working of assemblies (as in the case of Uttaramerur for the Chola administration).

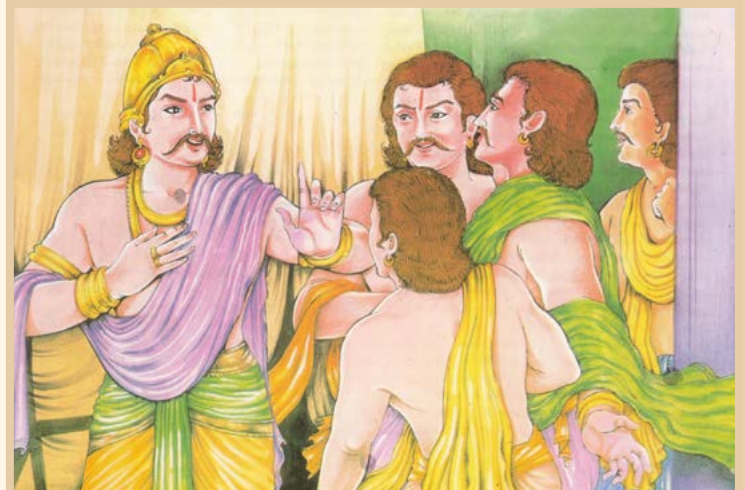
3. Integration

Our third achievement is the integration of the enormous landmass and human mass of India. We take it for granted by repeating such slogans as 'unity in diversity', but too often forget what made the 'unity' possible. 'The country that lies north of the ocean, and south of the snowy mountains, is called Bharata,' asserts *Vishnu Purana* (II.3.1), and we find designations such as Jambudvipa or Bharatavarsha in the early literature, but how did this integration take place when the comparable landmass of Europe could not achieve it? Scholars agree that the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism across the land, and the resulting sharing of a spiritual culture are among the chief factors of integration.

In practice, the two Epics played a major role, spreading the ideal

of dharma to every nook and corner of the country. There is perhaps no region of India that does not 'remember' having been crossed by Rama, one of the Pandavas or some great rishi. Besides, a dense network of tirthas and other holy sites created a sacred geography for India, making use of the institution of pilgrimage: witness the Char Dhams at the 'four corners' of India, the twelve Jyotirlingas or the 51 Shakti Mahapithas—not only is the whole map carefully covered, but the land becomes a metaphor for the body of the Mother. The beauty of this cultural integration is that it was an organic process controlled by no authority or caste or political power, and that it stamped out no local culture. In effect, we may empirically define Hinduism as the interface between Vedic and regional folk and tribal cultures.

Contrary to a common misconception that wants the Indian nation to have been the British rule's creation, the above integration was not merely cultural: it was political as



well. The Mauryan Empire extended to the whole of India and Afghanistan, minus the far South. Later empires never quite recovered this extent, but always strove towards it, and ended up sharing concepts and norms of governance and administration across India.



4. Interface with Other Civilizations

India's interface with other civilizations was rich, of long-standing and remarkably peaceful barring a couple of military campaigns. The Harappans travelled to the Gulf, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Two thousand years later, Indians traded with the Romans and also eastward, exporting spices, jewels, timber and textiles. Culture often followed trade: Hinduism and Buddhism spread across Asia and the Mediterranean world. When the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang returned from India in the 8th century ce, he was accompanied by a white elephant gifted by King Harsha, whose load consisted mostly

of manuscripts—knowledge, more than gold or jewels, was India's chief item of export. Her spiritual and intellectual systems left traces in Christianity and found echoes in Greek thought, even if the linkages remain somewhat speculative. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* gave rise to literary and artistic traditions owned by much of Southeast Asia. Indian architecture found sublime expressions in Borobudur's Stupa or Angkor-Vat's temple, besides myriads of smaller temples all the way to Vietnam and Korea. The *Panchatantra* influenced the *Arabian Nights*, while Ayurveda travelled all the way to Rome and Japan. All in all, the world was left a richer place for India's multifaceted contributions.

5. India's Ecological Traditions

Her ecological traditions are our chosen fifth great achievement. 'Heaven is my father; my mother is this vast earth, my close kin,' asserts the Rig Veda, rejecting any gulf between the creator and the created. The universe was compared to a 'thousand-branched tree', mountains and rivers turned into gods and goddesses. Practices such as sacred groves, animal sanctuaries, medical treatments for plants and animals, and extensive networks of water harvesting and management, some of them going back to Harappan times, were the practical outcome of this attitude. It preached the interconnectedness of all creatures, the milking—not 'conquest'—of nature (the *Mahabharata* compares the whole earth to a cow), respect of all life forms and simplicity of living: India cultivated the art of being happy with little, Western consumerism that of being unhappy with much.

6. Svabhava and Svadharma

The all-important concept of svabhava and svadharma is our next stop: the recognition that everyone has his own distinct nature and therefore his own distinct spiritual needs and path to self-fulfilment—any existing path, or a new one if necessary. From this acceptance of the ‘Other’ (not tolerance, a much-abused and now meaningless term), spiritual freedom and pluralism ensued, to a degree unthinkable in the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions. There lies, clearly,

the solution to many current national and world conflicts—provided the attitude is reciprocal.

7. Her Creativity in Scientific and Technological Fields

India’s creativity in scientific and technological fields is as enormous as

it is overlooked, or else misunderstood—especially by us Indians! We have all heard the names of Aryabhata, Brahmagupta or Bhaskaracharya, but there is little awareness of their actual contributions, of their predecessors and commentators. India’s share in the revival of mathematics in Europe, channelled there through the Arabs, is also under-represented. Mathematics and astronomy apart, feats of metallurgy (wootz steel, rust-resistant iron,

zinc distillation, among others) and other technologies (gemmology, crafts, textile, shipping, etc.) are also poorly known to the average Indian.

8. Spiritualization of Art and Literature

It has often been said that India has attempted to spiritualize every aspect of life, to the extent that there is little that may be called ‘secular’ in the real sense of the term. The spiritualization of art and literature is especially conspicuous, with the creation of numerous traditions of sacred dance, music, painting and architecture, all of them celebrating the divinity of life and its multifarious forms of beauty.

9. Systems of Yoga

The ninth achievement in our list is the creation of systems of yoga, possibly India’s greatest gift in the field of self-exploration and realization. It has generously expanded beyond India’s borders, conquering Western nations, where yoga instructors and practitioners abound, clearly filling a void left by the retreat of institutionalized religion there.

10. Renaissance in Spirituality, Art and Science

Our tenth and eleventh items require little elaboration: the first is the 19th-century renaissance in spirituality, art and science, an unexpected but powerful Indian reaction to the colonial invasion of minds, which saw the emergence of great figures from Sri Ramakrishna to Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Abanindranath Tagore or Jagadis Chandra Bose.

11. Rejuvenation of 19th-century Western Literature and Thought



It is important to note that India made significant contributions to the rejuvenation of 19th-century Western literature and thought, following the first translations of Sanskrit and Pali texts into European languages.

European and American thinkers and writers, from Schopenhauer or Michelet to Emerson and Thoreau found in Indian thought and spirituality a fresh source of inspiration. India, vanquished at home, for a time humbled Europe by revealing to her an older and richer civilization. Physicists, too, such as Tesla, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Oppenheimer or Bohm, found in Vedantic concepts stimulating leads and hints.

12. India's Continuity

The twelfth and last achievement of Indian civilization is that it survived at all. It

need not have: it could have followed the path to disappearance that ancient Egypt or Greece took. The reasons for this survival are many and complex; in the last analysis, one may state that its deeper roots perhaps made the whole difference.

What India Did Not Contribute

The above list claims no finality; it is merely illustrative and open-ended. But it needs to be supplemented with contributions India never made: wars of religion, colonial conquest and plunder, slave trade, genocides, world wars, concentration camps are unknown to India's past, but have left large red stains over the history of Western civilization.

India and the West have much to learn from each other, but the latter more so, if our world is to fulfil its potential. □



A Peep into Indian Dining

Like in other cultures, proper habits of eating and drinking are an important part of Indian culture. These habits differ from place to place, depending on local customs, traditions, and even weather.

Indian cooking uses an extensive array of utensils for various purposes. But in general, cutlery is not used for eating, as many foods—such as roti and sabzi (bread and curry in Hindi)—are best enjoyed when eating with the hand.

Sitting cross legged on the floor or on mat, and eating with one's hands is widely in vogue, though dining tables are commonplace these days. One has to thoroughly wash hands before one starts eating (which is not a requirement for eating with cutlery as in Western dining practice). Irrespective of whether one takes food with cutlery or with right hand, one is expected to wash hands before and after partaking food.

Not all Indian foods should be eaten with the hands, however. If the food is soupy, such as many daals, spoons can be used. Additionally, foods such as rice are eaten with spoons in both North and South India, more so in case of formal occasions as in a restaurant or a buffet where food is not served on banana leaf.

The concept of '*uchchishtam*' (in Sanskrit) *etho* (in Bengal), *aitha* (in Orissa), *jutha* (in North India), *ushta* (in Western India), *echil* (in Tamil Nadu), *echil* (in Kerala), *enjal* (in Karnataka), or *engili* (in Andhra Pradesh) is a common belief in India. It can refer to the food item or the utensils or serving dishes, that has come in contact with someone's mouth, or saliva or the plate while eating. It may also

refer to leftover food. It is considered rude and unhygienic to offer someone food contaminated with saliva. It is, however, not uncommon for spouses, or extremely close friends or family, to offer each other such food and is not considered disrespectful. In certain cases, as in the first lunch by the newly-weds, sharing food from each other's leaves/plates may be thought as an indication of intimacy and bonding.

The cardinal rule of dining is to always use the right hand when eating or receiving food and not the left. The left hand is not used to eat so that it can be used for serving food from the serving dish onto your plate using serving spoons, tongs, etc. In many parts of India food is served on leaves such as banana and Sal leaves. It is customary in parts of India to recite a prayer before eating for example: *brahmarpanam brahma havih brahmagnau brahmanahutam brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamadhina*. (Gita, 4.24) 'Any means of offering is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, the fire in which the offering is made is Brahman, and the one who offers is Brahman. Such a person who abides in Brahman indeed gains Brahman'. □



India's Culture, Society and Economy

Its Past, Present and Future

S. GURUMURTHY

The Critical Question

The single most critical question which has tormented the Indian establishment comprising thinkers, intellectuals, academicians, political leaders, policy makers, economists and sociologists since Independence is whether the Indian religions, culture, traditions, lifestyle and values are compatible with the contemporary times, particularly for economic development. This question has also acutely tested the faith and conviction of the people in Hindu culture which constituted, according to the Supreme Court, the way of life, ethos and traditions of the Indian nation itself.¹ It has also challenged the capacity of the religious and spiritual leaders to help sustain the faith of the people in their religion and philosophy. While the Indian establishment had virtually concluded that India's traditions and culture are incompatible with contemporary economic thinking, the people of the country did not agree with the establishment and the religious and spiritual leadership of India had kept the faith of the people alive in both.

But, with India now perceived as a rising world Super-power by think-tanks like the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relation (ICRIER) in India² and many outside India, it is time to make a value judgement on Indian culture—its past, present

and future—to know whether it is compatible with contemporary demands and what is its contributory role for India and for the world as India emerges as a global force. This calls for a look back and look ahead from our current position

Indian Mind under Western Influence

In free India's discourse, the proponents of our sense of this ancient nation, Hindu philosophy, culture and lifestyle had always been on the defensive for the last several decades because the colonialists had made us believe that the West was always advanced in economics and technology and we were always backward in both. Since the soft India was militarily conquered and colonised, the colonial and the other Western thinkers, consistently labelled India as barbaric [Wm. Archer³/ Winston Churchill⁴], or as semi-barbaric [Karl Marx⁵], or as disqualified for development in modern capitalism because of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs [Max Weber⁶] or as functioning anarchy [JK Galbraith⁷] and exerted great negative influence on the Indian mind and on Indians' opinion about India.

Of them, according to studies, Karl Marx and Max Weber, neither of whom visited India nor otherwise are deeply familiar with Hindu culture and traditions, have exerted the greatest influence on Indian academic and

□ The author is a well-known columnist from Chennai.

intellectual establishment.⁸ The continuing tsunami of such negative academic and intellectual vibrations devalued the Hindu philosophy, culture, society, traditions and values in the mind of the Indian scholars and rated them as backward and unsuitable for contemporary world. A well-known Indian economist, Dr Raj Krishna, even described, as late as in 1978, the moderate GDP growth rate of India as 'Hindu Growth Rate.'⁹ This term was later popularised by the then World Bank chief McNamara¹⁰ to say that India would always survive on aid from West and deride India. Undeniably the Indian mind was dominantly influenced by the Western scholars and philosophers.

The U-turn—Western Scholars Now Disprove the Detractors

But in the last decade or thereabouts, this whole impression has undergone a change with the rise of India. With the rise of Japan in 1970s, of the East Asian nations in 1980s, of China in 1990s and of India at the dawn of the 21st century, a huge geo-political and cultural power shift has been taking place in the world from the Euro-American West to Asia. The assumption in, and of, the West till Asia rose was that West was the First [rate] World and the rest belonged to the Second and Third [rate] Worlds. The rise of Asia, Japan first, prompted the Western scholars study whether such rise was founded on any potential inherent in them.

In one such study, Paul Bairoch, a Belgian economist, came out with his stunning finding that as late as in 1750, India (with 24.5%) and China (with 33%) had a combined share of 57.5% of the global GDP, when the share of Britain was 1.8% and that of US just 0.1%.¹¹ This led to two huge debates in the West. One, whether the West had a lesser standard of living compared to Asia as late as in 18th century; two, whether the rise of West was due to any superior qualities or capabilities inherent in it, or, it was just exploitation of its colonies. Based on Bairoch's study, some historians like Ferdinand Braudel said that the standard of living of the West was not higher than that of Asia before industrialisation. Some felt that the West exploited the Rest and particularly Asia and grew and others differed.

As if to resolve the debate, the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation [OECD], a forum of developed nations of the world, constituted a study—the Development Studies Institute—under Angus Maddison, a great economic historian, to study, in substance, whether Paul Bairoch was right. Angus Maddison, who felt at the start that Bairoch was unlikely to be correct, ended up endorsing him completely. In his study 'World Economic History—A Millennial Perspective',¹² Maddison not only confirmed Bairoch, but went on to say that India was the world economic leader for 17 centuries from the beginning of the Common Era, with China,

which overtook India later, as number two. And after CE 1800, both of them lost out—with India crashing to 1.8% and China 6.2% in 1900.

As the British Historian William Dalrymple wrote, the current rise of India is not rags to richest story, but that of an empire, which had lost out temporarily, striking back to acquire its due position in the world. These studies have completely disproved the views of Marx and Weber, Galbraith and Rajkrishna and also established that the Indian culture and way of life could and did build a successful globally powerful economic model for India. So, India, rich in cultural heritage, was also economically prosperous. It was, therefore, canard spread by the colonial scholars that the Indian culture and traditions were incompatible with economic prosperity.

Traditional Culture and Modernity, Economy and Society

It is necessary at this point to know what, in the Hindu understanding, is tradition, culture and modernity and what is their role in the economy and society. Our culture, according to the Kanchi Mahaswami who lived for a century among us, is founded on the twin principle of '*aparigriha*' (contentment) and '*nirahambhavana*' (humility). Both these virtues are the products of the larger consciousness of relation among humans and within all elements of creation; they recognise and imply a higher duty to fellow humans and to nature. The virtue of contentment recognises

and balances economic differences. Humility comprehends and addresses all differences. These two virtues help to unify the diversities.

These twin virtues are, therefore, in tune with the very principle of creation, namely, unity in diversity. The diverse appearances of big and small, high and low, and weak and strong are harmonised by these virtues of higher relations. This is supplemented by worldly relations, family, community, society and nation. Our culture honours relations. It rests on relations and it promotes and sustains relations in turn, as Sri Krishna says in Bhagvad Gita (3.11), on the basis of '*parasparam bhavayantah*', namely, mutually co-operative relation. Our tradition and culture mutually and co-operatively related individual to families, families to communities and communities to larger society and the larger society to the country and finally the country to the world on the principle of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ['the whole earth is one family']. No other ancient civilisation even thought of the world as 'family'; the modern civilisation looks at the world as 'market'.

The expanding relationship of these collectives is well-described in Mahabharata capturing the integral relation between individual, family, village, the country and God, thus:

Tyajet ekam Kulasyarthe, Gramasyarthe Kulam tyajet;

*Gramam Janapadasyarthe, Atmarthe prithivim tyajet*¹³

The [rights of] individuals are to be sacrificed for the family; [rights of] families are to be sacrificed for a village; [rights of] villages are to be sacrificed for the country; and when it comes to realising God, everything can be sacrificed.

The meaning is that the individual owes duties to families, families to village [neighbourhood] village to the country. So the relation between the individual to the nation is interlinked and integrated by a sense of duty to one another. The traditional society is relation-oriented which binds everyone to duties to families, near and dear, community and society, even to nature and animals. This sense of duty is comprehended in the concept of Dharma. Now let us see how the decline of culture or collective behavioural norm leads to economic decline.

Cultural Decline Leads to Economic Decline

In contrast, in the Western civilisation there is no integrality, only compartmentality. The individual and his rights are supreme, subject only to the law. If there is a conflict between the individual and the family or between the individual and the village or society, the individual rights prevail. In the Western view, the family itself is a contract, a terminable one. There is nothing called society, said Margaret Thatcher.¹⁴ Driven by individualism, modernity rests on law and contracts to regulate individual human beings. The principal drive of modernity is rights and rights-consciousness—the individual rights, human rights, gender rights, animal rights and so on. In fact the core of modernity consists in releasing humans from tradition, traditional relations, bonds and atomise them and grant rights to them.

While India, China, and generally Asia, are on the rise, the Euro-American economies are declining or slowing. The world which has

witnessed almost a breakdown of the global financial system in the year 2008 saw two distinct responses. The Asian countries which are largely family-community based recovered fast. *The Economist Magazine* wrote a cover-page article on Asia's 'Astonishing Rebound.'¹⁵

But the West, which has over several decades, weakened family and communities have not recovered from the downtrend. Actually, the bankruptcy of households in America triggered the financial crisis in America that exploded as the financial crisis in US, which is later exported by America as global economic meltdown. The recent economic downturn of the West, particularly America, is a standing example of how this sequence of decline in culture and values led to decline in national economy is a cause and effect sequence. This led to the decline of families. This necessitated the state with social security programme to intervene to take care of people—the elders, infirm, and the unemployed, who were left unprotected because of the decline of culture and therefore families.

In the year 1980, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NABER) in US had warned against this kind of State-provided social security which makes families functionless and purposeless adding that it would inevitably cause 'serious erosion in family values.' The NABER said that while business firms have taken over much of the family functions, production of food, the State taking over the vital functions would render the family meaningless.¹⁶ This amounted to virtual nationalisation of families. With the nationalisation of families, the propensity of the families to save also was eroded. This also further accentuated decline in savings. The current value of the future social security burden of US is estimated at \$104 trillions¹⁷,

which is 6.5 times the GDP of America! This is the cost of the decline in culture and families. Experts say that this is a dynamite waiting to blow up the US economy.

America Follows Bahuka's Economics

The economic policies, rejected in India a thousand years ago, which makes the people dependent on government was originally expounded by an ancient Indian thinker Bahuka in *Srimad Bhagavatam*. The infamous Kamsa, who became a hate figure because he repeatedly killed the children of Vasudeva, asked his adviser Bahuka how to make the people, who hate him, accept him. To which Bahuka replied:

Open your treasury to the people; give them free money to enjoy life; breakup families; teach women that chastity is not worth having at the cost of pleasure; bring up children to look upon parents as old and useless; once people begin to believe in unrestrained pleasures of life as the goal of life, self-restraint will disappear; and men will be like well-fed cattle at the mercy of their cowherds and like uncomplaining beasts, obey your lash as if it were a favour from you.¹⁸

This is precisely what the US economic system has done to its people. It has freed the people from families and relations and enslaved them to the government. These individuals are individually free, but collectively slaves! Each one of Bahuka's advice has been implemented in US. As there is loss of faith in the ideal of chastity, and life is pleasure-driven a fifth of the pregnant women are teenaged girls; 41% of the pregnant women are unwed¹⁹; and half of the households are government dependent.²⁰ Most Americans have discarded their relations, turned families into contracts, to be finally at the mercy of the government. The individuals, women, and elders got freedom from their families

only to become slaves of the governments. So the advice of Bahuka rejected by Indians thousands of years ago has now been adopted by US with the disastrous consequences which India has avoided. The US today bears testimony to the fact that the decline in culture leads to decline in economic performance and strength.

Dharma and Modernity

The sense of duty in traditional model and the sense of right in modernity are a total contrast. The duty of one transforms into the right of another. So Dharma transcends both duty and right because it comprehends both. Dharma consists of self-enforcing norms by the voluntary submission of the people. Culture is the collective behaviour according to the norms of Dharma which protects Dharma; and Dharma which is the behavioural norm of the individual and then collective, protects culture. The relation between Dharma and Culture is mutually beneficial co-operation. Enforced law which creates enforceable rights cannot create families; but it can destroy them. It cannot create relations; but it can destroy them. It cannot create communities; but it can destroy them. This is self evident from a comparison of law and contract dominated West and culture and relation dominated—read Dharma driven—Indian society.

The Protective Hand of Indian Culture

The principles of Dharma, embedded in our cultural values, which have protected our society and economy are: respect for parents and elders, respect for women; respect for teachers; respect for animals; respect for nature. These principles are embodied in the concept of Pancha Mahayagna. The Upanishad proclaims, '*matru devo bhava, pithru devo bhava, acharya devo bhava*' and '*atithi devo bhava*'.

Our Vedas proclaim reverence for mother earth. Our religious literature calls upon all to worship girls and women through *kanya puja* and *sumangali puja*.

The Mahabharata insists on protection of forests and tigers saying that tigers protect forests and forests protect tigers.²¹ Our spiritual literature implores us to worship rivers, mountains and other forms of nature. It is these principles of Dharma embodied in our culture which have saved the Indian economy; environment and ecology in India. It has preserved the respect for parents, elders, teachers, women, nature. No other major religion of the world today makes it part of the religious practices to respect parents, teachers, elders and nature. In fact, it is a known fact that Bible's stance is that all form of nature worship is not only idolatry, but also foolish, and to worship nature in any manifestation is to exchange the creator for the created.²² Islam is even more opposed to reverence for anything other than Allah. It calls upon the children to disobey the parents to obey the religion.²³ Neither in Christianity nor in Islam are teachers other than those who teach of Bible or Quran venerated.

How the cultural value of society and family influence over the individual is not just a theoretical idea but an effective functioning value is brought out in a commercial research to sell products. It says: 'In India, social acceptability is more important than individual achievement and is given priority in an individual's life. Group affiliations are given precedence with family traditions and values. For most Indians, family is the prime concern and an individual's duties lies with the family. In India people's search for security and prestige lies within the confines of the near and dear.'²⁴ It is traditional cultural value which has sustained the Indian family, society

and economy, even when the Indian state had remained hostile to our Dharma for almost millennia, and continues to sustain even today. These values constitute the social, cultural, and civilisational capital of India.

This cultural orientation is self-evident in the Indian economy. The family savings in India which is the direct product of family culture is now 25% of the GDP²⁵ and according to Goldman Sachs, a top global banker, this has ensured that India does not need foreign investment for its infrastructure development. Since 1991 to 2011 the amount of foreign investment that has funded Indian development was only 2% of the total; while the rest 98% has been funded by local savings²⁶ in which the family tops with 70% of the national savings.²⁷

It is the culture of protection of the elders, care of young and the responsibilities which the family undertakes as a cultural institution, and the disciplining of the relations between humans and between humans and nature through the concept of Dharma and sustained by culture that has protected our economy and society. In contrast, in the West, the care of the parents, unemployed, infirm, ill-healthy are all the concern for the state. All family obligations are nationalised in the West, while in India it is culture founded on Dharma which takes care of all family obligations.

Indian Culture Protects Environment

In respect of protection of environment by inculcating cultural values there is no parallel to the Hindu ethos which look upon and train the people to look at nature as divine. On the contrary in monotheistic faiths nature is considered to be secular intended for the enjoyment of humans. In his famous essay published in the popular *Science* magazine in 1967, Lynn White held the biblical view of

dominance of earth and nature by man as the primary cause of environmental crises.²⁸ The world in the tip of environmental crisis needs the Hindu perspective of nature as sacred.

World Needs India and Indian Culture and Spirituality for Survival

The world, particularly the West, needs India. That is why two most famous historians, Arnold Toynbee from UK and Will Durant from US, who lived through the turbulent 20th century, had this to say:

It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in self-destruction of the human race. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family.—*Arnold Toynbee*²⁹

It is true that even across the Himalayan barrier India has sent to us such questionable gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and above all numerals and decimal system. But these are not the essence of her spirit: they are trifles compared to what we may learn from her in the future. Perhaps in return for the conquest, arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, a pacifying love for all living thing.—*Will Durant*³⁰

If this were what Arnold Toynbee and Will Durant said in the last century, one of the most well-known economists and thinkers of the world, Jean Pierre Lehmann, who was also the Adviser to the World Trade Organisation and is presently Professor in IMD, the famous management institute in Switzerland wrote, in 2006 that what is needed

is a global ethical and spiritual role model for which the best candidate to fill the spot is India with non-conflicting Hinduism, adding that globalisation cannot work without Hindu way of life.³¹

The Values the West Needs from India Today

The West needs to learn from India's cultural values

- ❖ to rebuild and protect the family and social foundations of its economy,
- ❖ to reinstate the reverence for nature, and

- ❖ to revive the respect for women. Individual rights, gender rights, children's rights, elders' rights, and other rights consciousness have undermined the respect for women and brought down the sustaining structures of the family and caused the lack of reverence for nature in the Western civilisation and led to the current environmental crisis.

Though, fortunately in India, these sustaining values—family and society, respect for women and reverence for nature—are still in functioning form, they are at great risk because of the continuation of colonial mindset through the intensification of the process of westernisation of the Indian intellectual, educational and media and generally the secular establishment, which in the name of modernisation is just an alibi for westernisation. The Indian intellectual establishment is unable to draw the line between the individual belief system and the country's ethos and way of life, it tends to throw the baby with the bath tub—namely discard the national culture as conflicting with secularism, which according to the Supreme Court of India it does not. This is precisely what the Supreme Court has said in its judgement in Prabhoo's case³² and Farooqi's case³³ where it has distinguished between

Hindu cultural values as the way of life of the people of India and the Hindu religion as such, saying that the Hindu cultural values is the foundation for secularism itself.

Conclusion

Because of the Indian establishment's lack of intellectual and political courage and because of the concept of political correctness, the very values which sustain the Indian family, society, economy and environment and which the West desperately needs to import from India for its own good and even survival, are at risk in India. The public discourse promoted by the politically correct establishment is making it fashionable to follow the very western model which has brought down the families, societies and economy; undermined the respect for women and made them carbon-copy the West and fight for their rights at the cost of respect; and destroyed the reverence for nature which has invited the global environmental crisis.

QED: Indian people need to reinforce their conviction in those values which many practise even today and the young India must be made to imbibe these values first in the interest of the Indian economy, society, and environment, before India can teach these values to the West.

The world—particularly the Western world—is keen to follow the Indian values and is already following it. Lisa Miller, the religious affairs editor of the *Newsweek* magazine wrote a stunning article on August 14, 2009 titled 'We are All Hindus Now'³⁴ referring to the changing American beliefs. She said that data shows,

We are becoming more like Hindus and less like Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other, and eternity; 65 percent of us believe—like Hindus—that 'many religions can lead to eternal life'; they include 37 percent of white evangelicals, the group most likely to believe that salvation is theirs alone; a third of the Americans burn, not bury the dead; a quarter of the American believe in rebirth.

The West needs from us, and imports, our spiritual and cultural assets. Is not that vision Swami Vivekananda proving right? Is not America now opening the gift from Swami Vivekananda it had kept unopened for over a century? But ironically when the West is looking at us, many of our intellectuals, academics and thinkers are looking to the West!

QED: To make young Indian consciously imbibe Hindu cultural values which the

contemporary India largely follows is the biggest challenge to India. □



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From Persia to the China Sea, from the icy regions of Siberia to the island of Java and Borneo, from Oceania to Socotra, India has propagated her beliefs, her tales and her civilization. She has left indelible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She has the right to reclaim in universal history the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to hold her place amongst the great nations summarizing and symbolizing the spirit of Humanity.

—**Sylvain Levi**, Quoted in *Journey of the Upanishads to the West*, Swami Tathagatananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, p.101

Shilpa Shastra

The Ancient Indian Approach to Architecture

Shilpa Shastra is an umbrella term for numerous Sanskrit texts that describe manual arts, the standards for religious iconography, prescribing among other things, the proportions of a sculptured figure, as well as rules of native Indian architecture. It includes such arts or crafts as carpentry, architecture, jewellery, acting, dancing, music, medicine, poetry and so on.

There are numerous traditions of Indian architecture. These ancient traditions, with many sub-traditions, are area specific and deeply connected to religious and social history of various areas such as Dravidian architecture, Bengal architecture, Rajasthani architecture, Gujarat architecture and so on. Often many of these schools of architecture are named after the periods of various royal dynasties that ruled a given state or region such as Cholas, Pallavas, Hoysala, Chalukya, Badami and so on. The modern Indian architecture has been influenced by many other sources such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam as well as from French and English style of architecture.

An important aspect of the Shilpa Shastra is Vastu Shastra (also vastu veda, 'science of construction'). While Shilpa Shastra explicitly deals with sculpture-forming statues, icons, stone murals, etc., Vastu Shastra is concerned primarily with building architecture-building houses, forts, temples, apartments, etc.

Vastu Shastra deals with the idea of how the laws of nature and element affect human dwellings. The designs are based on directional alignments. It is applicable especially to Hindu temples, and covers other domains, including vehicles, vessels, furniture, sculpture, paintings, etc. The foundation of Vastu is traditionally ascribed to the sage Mamuni Mayan in South and Vishvakarma in North India.

According to Vastu Shastra, the world comprises five basic elements known as the *pancha maha bhuta*. These are earth (*bhumi*), water (*jala*) air (*vayu*), fire (*agni*), and space (*akasha*). Vastu Shastra holds the view that there is an invisible and constant relation between all the five elements. Thus, people can improve their conditions by designing their buildings by understanding the effectiveness of these five natural forces.

In Indian architecture, the dwelling is itself a shrine. A home is called Manushyalaya, 'human temple'. It is not merely a shelter for human beings in which to rest and eat. The concept behind house design is the same as for temple design. Also, Vastu Shastra takes help of Vastu Purusha Mandala which constitutes the mathematical and diagrammatic basis for drawing a design. It is the metaphysical plan of a building. Purusha refers to energy, power, soul or cosmic man. Mandala is the generic name for any plan or chart which symbolically represents the cosmos.

While Vastu Shastra had long been essentially restricted to temple architecture, there has been a revival of it in India, in recent decades. It has become quite popular due to the efforts of some well-known Vastu Shastra experts in recent times. Due to their efforts, many people these days take guidance for undertaking any construction, especially dwelling units. □

Indian Culture: Beyond Curry, Caste and Cow

SUNDARI KRISHNAMURTHY

Culture can be described as the thread that holds any society together, if not the skeleton that determines its structure. Culture is often used as a mechanism of social control, as a vehicle for transmission of status claims, as a means of socialization, as a symbolic rallying point for group solidarity, as a weapon in social conflict, and even as a means of communication.

If we are to examine culture in general, or Indian culture in particular, through word pictures or metaphors, then a theoretical framework appropriate to the complexity of culture is required. Systems Theory appears to provide an approach that permits the complexity of Indian culture to be described and analyzed, at a high level of abstraction but with precision rather than vagueness. Thus we can examine three main components of Indian culture:

1. Material culture ('curry'),
2. Non-material or cognitive culture ('caste') and,
3. Normative culture ('cow'), with all their interactions, products and by-products.

Let us discuss these.

Material Culture

'Material culture' corresponding to *curry* collectively denotes food, clothing, ornaments, jewellery, utensils, housing, tools, instruments

and all material objects of civilization, which connote the 'artifacts' of culture or society.

These material objects indicate the level of evolution of human beings in different regions, climates, time or historical periods and are often frozen indicators of the culture of human beings. Material objects often reflect aesthetic and utilitarian value and factually show the capacity of a human race to evolve through imagination, creation and innovation. Material objects also serve to differentiate *Homo sapiens* from other plants and animals on the surface of the earth.

A few examples will serve to illustrate the uniqueness of the material culture of human beings. Ants may be seen to collect and store food. But man cultivates a large variety of crops and indulges in a wide variety of economic activity like production, distribution and consumption and also uses sophisticated tools like coinage and banking. Bees, spiders and tailorbirds instinctively and symmetrically construct their abodes. But man, even in the simple act of construction has produced arts and sciences like architecture, sculpture and painting, which are not only imitative but creative and symbolic. Man not only has produced art forms but has preserved them also, for generations to learn from these aspects of culture.



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The material culture found in India is amazing in its richness, diversity and ingenuity. It largely reflects the diverse racial, linguistic, religious and ethnic groups of people living here. Indian cuisine portrays these aspects of culture very vividly, not only in the ingredients used for preparation, but also in the utensils used, the processes devised and the presentation of the food. Food is different at different times and places: a goddess, an important item to welcome and entertain guests or *athitis* and Gods, a portion to share with other beings, like crows and dogs before a meal is partaken and even used as a remembrance to honor departed ancestors through *pinda* offerings on *shraddha* days. Indian restaurants the world over are popularly sought for their 'Indian curry' and snacks like '*pappads*' have become hot favorites.

Clothing, their production and processes, connected India through the Silk Route; muslins and cottons brought riches, trade and commerce, through merchants, sea voyages and camel caravans. India's pride of place in world commerce in ancient times was earned through the fabled gems and jewelry, gold and pearls, spices and nuts. Bronze sculpture, jewelled paintings, intricate miniatures, sandalwood carvings are a few of the rich material products of Indian culture, created by artisans and craftsmen with their traditional knowledge systems, which are still treasured all over the world.

However it is material culture, which is susceptible to change in any society. Jeans, T-shirts, pants and other Western apparel have displaced much of Indian types of clothing among the population in India, while burgers and fries, pasta and pizza, along with the ubiquitous coco cola, have come to replace traditional Indian foods. Vertical apartment

complexes have altered the landscapes of Indian cities, towns and even rural areas. Indian curry, spices, nuts, prawns, clothing, jewelry, utensils and ornaments have found a place globally, as has vegetarianism and eco-friendly products—the last two being processes devised in India, to enable humans to live in harmony with nature. Multilateral diffusion of products of Indian material culture is happening today because of the global economy, bringing in competition through global marketing and advertising through mass media.

Non-material or Cognitive Culture

Non-material or Cognitive Culture analogous with 'caste' represents collectively the language, literature, social customs, tradition, associations, organizations, economic practices, political and legal structures, in short, all the 'mentifacts' or mental products that make a civilization.

Culture and communication have become the two distinguishing marks of the mental ability of human society. Man's ability to preserve his memory of the past in language enables him to look backward and forward in history and increase his adaptability to changes and also an ability to turn the historical movements in a definite planned direction. Man's ability again to perceive the meaning and significance of the causal forces and teleological compulsions in historical events and processes resists the repetitive mechanism of the universe. While man legislates to nature an animal obeys it. Human society has a civilization and culture which are not representations of nature but refinements of it.

Both Psychology and Sociology have produced enough studies to show that 'cognitive or non-material culture' evolved

through the human pursuit can have six kinds of value:

(1) theoretic, (2) aesthetic, (3) social, (4) political, (5) economic and (6) religious.

When humans pursued theoretic value it was when they were interested in discovering truth, by looking for identities and differences and sought only to observe and reason. It led to producing theoretical sciences, which were the first mental products of civilization. Science and technology are two important aspects of cognitive culture. In pursuing economic value, mankind found out those entities which were useful and satisfied bodily needs or self preservation. This created for society methods to develop utilities, trade, commerce and business, whereby tangible wealth could be generated and accumulated. All economic institutions emerged because of this collective pursuit by the human race to survive through these end products of cognitive culture.

Anthropology reveals that individuals did not exist in isolation. Some degree of social life is present even in the lowest organisms. Such a thing as a completely asocial variety of animal does not exist. Social life confers distinct biological advantages over the animals participating in it, for example, survival. The dominant principle of social life is not the struggle for existence but cooperation. Social life is probably coeval with life itself otherwise life would not have been established. Society with its norms, customs, associations and human relationship structures, like family and kinship, caste and creed, ethnicity and values evolved in India, as in other parts of the world through the aggregation of humans.

Man is not born human but becomes human through socialization and acculturation, both social processes. The *kula* or extended family, the *grama* or village, the *jati* or caste, were cognitive products, which sheathed

the Indian individual with ties of kinship, geographic area and economic occupation and thus facilitated survival. Urbanization, modernization and westernization are a few of the change processes that have ushered in India the nuclear family in place of the extended family; caste has become the basis of vote bank politics and the regulation and control of *grama* or village norms have been lost in the distance and formality of institutions like the courts, police and jail. Legal and political institutions have created parties and people interested in the pursuit of power more than political values, which has led to the complete loss of autonomy for the Indian citizen today.

An awareness of form and harmony is aroused in people, who pursue aesthetic value. Grace, symmetry and fitness are appreciated and created in objects and processes by those who are influenced by this type of value. From the above, it can be seen that Indian culture has a good stock of 'mentifacts' or cognitive products and processes that have molded its civilization and the current generation has to rethink and rediscover for itself, the material and mental products that it is going to assimilate or abandon, adopt or adapt, for transmitting to future generations.

Normative Culture

Normative culture representing the sacred elements of culture and symbolized by 'cow' is the third and final component of Indian culture being examined. Values and ethics, behaviour and conduct, religious and spiritual values, form the invisible part of Indian normative culture. Religious values are the highest values as it seeks to unify experience. Tolerance and co-existence have kept alive several creeds in India, which has the largest multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-

ethnic population in the world. Fasts and feasts, fairs and festivals, prayer and silence, diverse temples and isolated caves are still alive and vibrant in the practices of millions in India, displaying their pursuit and practice of religion and spirituality. The worship of trees and cows, snakes and even rats have created divergent views of being crudely animistic or divinely spiritual, yet are more indicative of the sublime merger in the integrity of creation.

The Indian, through his socialization and acculturation in the smaller circles of family and community, has re-shaped and re-molded his biological processes and shown himself as a spiritual creature with individuality, openness, wholeness and transcendence. This is because of his discovery and search for values and ethics, that have emerged from the crucibles of psycho-social and spiritual development. Man's capacity to judge, evaluate and regulate his behaviour according to values (*purusarthas*), is the principal mechanism of his enlarged and refined social environment.

In brief, *Homo sapiens* became *Homo symbolicus* and *Homo moralis*.

Man may yet be adolescent as the symbolic and moral animal but with his ascent into spirituality, his onward journey is significant. This awareness and pursuit is still within the framework of the basic polarity of existence and transcendence, actuality and potentiality found within the human being. At the biological level man experiences tension between survival and perfection; at the psycho-social dimension between id and conscience, self-regulation and self-expression; at the transcendental dimension between being and becoming. All these dialectical conflicts resolve themselves when man pursues ultimate values of *dharma*.

The pursuit of the Good, the True and the Beautiful of *satyam* (*sat*), *shivam* (*chit*) and

sundaram (*ananda*), in Indian parlance, is what distinguishes man from other creatures in this planet. In India the pursuit of the eternal value of *dharma* has led to a spiritual voyage of self-discovery and liberation, *moksha*. How is this pursuit possible and is it unique only to the human being? Adi Shankara, in his commentary on the *Taittiriya Upanisad* (II, I, 1) says just this:

Since all beings without exception are modifications of the essence of food and since all are equally descendents of Brahman, why is man alone unique? Because of his pre-eminence. In what again does this pre-eminence consist? In his competence for *karma* (work) and *jñāna* (knowledge). For man alone is qualified for rights and duties as also for knowledge, by virtue of his ability, craving (for results) and non-difference (to results).

That a person desirous (of results) and possessed of learning and capacity is qualified for work and knowledge is proved, by the evidence of another Vedic text which says:

In man alone is the Self most manifest, for he is the best endowed with intelligence. He speaks what he knows, he sees what he knows; he knows what will happen tomorrow; he knows the higher and the lower worlds; he aspires to achieve immortality through mortal things. He is thus endowed (with discrimination) while other beings have consciousness of hunger and thirst only (*Aitareya Aranyaka*, II, iii, 2-5).

Conclusion

Man is culture-bound even as fish is water-bound. Indian culture is located in a matrix of spirituality, as all philosophy and philosophical systems have been *moksha shastras*. Hence Indian culture is beyond the material aspects (curry), cognitive aspects (caste) and even normative aspects (cow). □

Ayurveda—‘the Science of Life’

Ayurveda, ‘the knowledge for or science of long life’, is the Indian system of traditional medicine and is now a widely recognized form of alternative medicine.

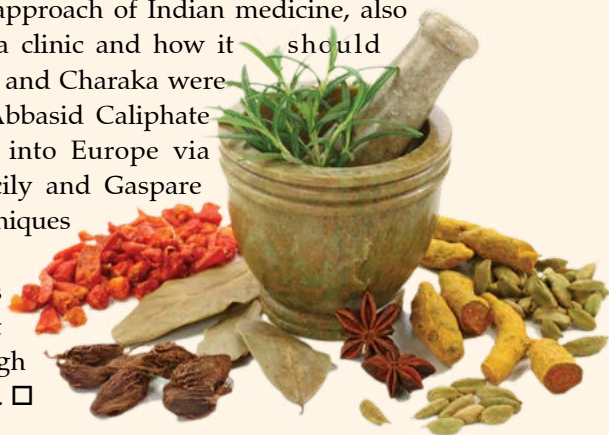
The earliest literature on Indian medical practice appeared during the Vedic period in India, i.e., in the mid-second millennium BCE. The *Sushruta Samhita* and the *Charaka Samhita*, encyclopedias of medicine compiled from various sources from the mid-first millennium BCE to about 500 CE, are among the foundational works of Ayurveda. In Indian mythology, the origin of ayurvedic medicine is attributed to Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods.

Ayurveda holds that five elements of earth (*prithivi*), water (*jala*), fire (*agni*), air (*vayu*) and space (*akasha*) compose the universe, including the human body. Ayurveda describes seven types of tissues of the body, known as the *saptadhatu*. They are plasma (*rasa dhatu*), blood (*rakta dhatu*), flesh (*mamsa dhatu*), adipose (*medha dhatu*), bone (*asthi dhatu*), marrow and nervous (*majja dhatu*), and reproductive fluid (*shukra dhatu*).

Ayurvedic literature deals elaborately with measures of healthful living during the entire span of life and its various phases. It stresses a balance of three elemental energies or humors: *vayu* / *vata* (air and space—‘wind’), *pitta* (fire & water—‘bile’) and *kapha* (water and earth—‘phlegm’). According to ayurvedic medical theory, these three substances or *doshas* are important for health, because when they are in balanced proportion, the body will be healthy, and when they are not in proportion, the body will be unhealthy in various ways. It also believes that each human possesses a unique combination of *doshas*. Ayurveda stresses the use of plant-based medicines and treatments. Ayurveda also focuses on exercise, yoga, and meditation. Chanting mantras too has been a feature of ayurveda. Several philosophers in India combined religion and traditional medicine.

Ayurveda has a long history, and is one of the oldest organised systems of medicine. The Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien (ca. 337-422 AD) wrote about the health care system of the Gupta empire (320–550) and described the institutional approach of Indian medicine, also visible in the works of Charaka, who mentions a clinic and how it should be equipped. The medical works of both Sushruta and Charaka were translated into the Arabic language during the Abbasid Caliphate (ca. 750). These Arabic works made their way into Europe via intermediaries. In Italy, the Branca family of Sicily and Gaspare Tagliacozzi (Bologna) became familiar with the techniques of Sushruta.

In India, over 100 colleges offer degrees in ayurvedic medicine. The Indian government supports research and teaching in ayurveda through many channels at both the national and state levels. □



Management Ideals and Indian Culture

VIJAY MENON

The Indian Scene

A pervasive disconnect from a strong foundation is palpable in the way organizations and functionaries exist in India today. That foundation is where Indian thought affords a panorama worth delving into.

The present situation is more precarious because today we know a lot at a superficial level but we do not truly recognize it. Rampant selfishness, greed, ego, money mutilating man, 'worship' of money. . . These are the problems and we know it. And yet we do not go deeper to investigate and resolve these issues. It is like knowing about hunger as a fact but not really doing anything to assuage it, making us speakers with nothing truly meaningful to say.

Man-Making

This is why in the word 'man making' that Swami Vivekananda used we find both the means and the end of all human endeavour. Organizations need to recognize that until they create enabling conditions for man-making, they will only end up where they started. Man-making is the means to lasting relevance as a company and leading to the goal of perpetual significance.

When Japan was battered by the triple whammy of an earthquake, tsunami and nuclear spillage, they talk of an Indian stranded in a hotel amidst all the confusion and tragedy. When the lady chef gave him food that day and did not give him a bill, this man remonstrated. She told him it was a day of national tragedy and so it was a day to give and not take; the tsunami might have broken their lives, but not their conscience. What Himalayan heights of thinking! Is this not what our scriptures have always thundered!

Man-making is the point. It is not making a man with skills and competencies as the management science elucidates, but of development of conscience and character. The resultant output would put the best planners to shame. Today's management is too much plan and too little man. When the centrality of man is compromised, what we build are organizations and not institutions.

When a spiritual titan like Swami Premananda (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) would stretch himself to ensure that everyone who came to Belur Math was fed and cared for, was he not laying the invincible foundation of eternal relevance? Was he not making people internalize the very reason why the institution existed, i.e., to see



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divinity in all of creation? Was he not merging the means and the end to an indivisible entity called organization culture, the very DNA of management?

‘Success’ or Values?

It takes a child but a second to correctly answer what the basic purpose and aim of an enterprise is. It is profits. And to get this we invented a sacred word called ‘practicality’ to be the signatory and co-conspirator of a selfish, brazen and arrogant distortion of character and morality. The epitaph sums it up—‘Successfully Unsuccessful’. Indian scriptures rush to salvage this gloom by extending the boundary of thought. Accordingly profits could be the intermediate goal. That is possible only when we look at not only success but also sustainability.

This is the management wisdom that we see in the call of Lord Krishna to Partha to see the Mahabharata war not as a battle to be won but as a support structure for eternal Dharma, thereby broadening the thought base of the subordinate called Arjuna. The kingdom, which Arjuna rightly deserved, would incidentally come to him in his larger resolve to buttress Dharma. Today’s management quest is about finding the one entity that adds lasting value. Is it product, service, strategy, skill? Our Shastras say all these are tangible emanations from the true service provider. If he is made, the rest has to follow. The script repeats in the fervent pitch of Vidura to Dhritarashtra that he was compromising what was most important for what was least

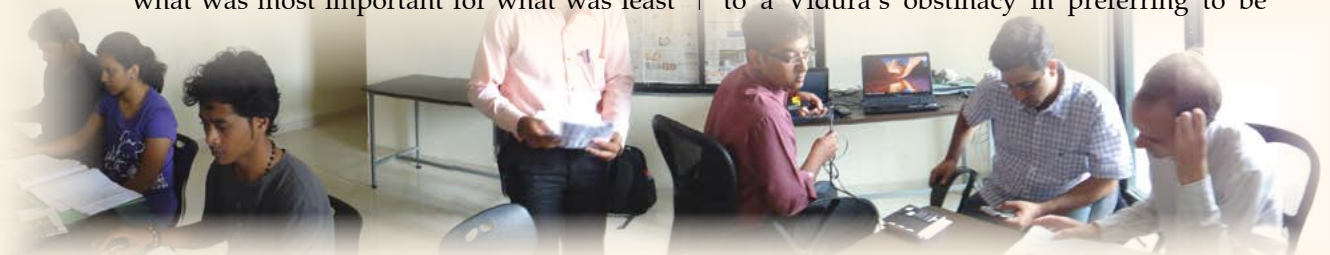
important and how that one misjudgment would be a recipe for disaster.

A correct understanding of Indian culture enables an organization to say that the one thing that supersedes everything is proposition. That is where all the constituents commingle to effect a transformational offering. Profiting from the morality of the contribution it becomes not just a return on investment but a return on conviction.

The True Meaning of Commitment

A vexing conundrum of management today is the word ‘commitment’. How do we engender commitment in a person? We totter here because we try to build commitment to abstract representations and use contrived methods to get there disconnected from our Puranic lore. In the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, all revelatory communications happen when a person is made to commit not to a unit called the family, institution or state alone, but integrated to the larger and deeper unit called Dharma. He is wedded to Dharma for that circumscribes all the multifarious expressions of commitment to all other stakeholders.

We see this everywhere in the epics, right from a Bharata’s celerity in spurning a kingdom, to a Rama’s ease in choosing life in the forest instead of luxurious life in the palace, and his potent rebuttal of Bharata when he splutters indignities even to an errant Kaikeyi thereby enthroning motherhood, to a Bhishma’s devotion to a promise given, to a Vidura’s obstinacy in preferring to be



honest rather than palatable, to a Lakshmana's glorification of brotherhood, to a Yudhishtira's spirited refusal to dethrone filial piety revealed by his act of prostrating to his elders in the battlefield in front of a full house. In all these actions, we find that the act is an expression of commitment to an ideal which is what is sought to be captured as a lesson. It comes under varied appellations of 'commitment to truth' or 'higher reality' or 'existential virtues' which outlives even the individual.

By paying homage to what outlives even an individual, our Rishis were farsighted managers in recognizing the DNA of building sustainable units of harmonious existence. In that one lesson—'don't jeopardize Dharma'—all expected behaviours, paradigms and patterns were drilled in. This is exactly what we lack today. Is there even one single conflict either between nations or within a nation that has been successfully resolved in the last 25 years? It is exactly this value that is missing.

The commitment to solve any conflict has to come from Universality and not a lesser truth called self-identity. That is why trade pacts are flawed, disputes intractable, diplomacy more of a postponement than of finality. A collage of incomplete results stemming from an inability to work backwards from the end called Dharma.

'Include and Complement'

Dharma has in its fold a glossary of meanings and one of it can be scientifically linked to what management as a discipline has been labouring without much success to accomplish—the concept of shared destiny. Sony's illustrious chief Akio Morita pens this down as one of the pillars of his management philosophy—shared destiny that creates multitudinous pathways of understanding the interconnectedness of human destiny.

To be one with the universe is the Vedantic truth broadcast by every Indian text and Master from the caves and peaks as the adhesive that holds the individual and the universe together. Today when companies have relooked at the ecosystem and redrawn the boundaries from focus on profits to focus on employees to focus on customer to focus on supplier to focus on socio-cultural milieu, we are witnessing this burgeoning Vedantic theme of larger and deeper integration. That one expression has in it the fortitude of a seed waiting to incarnate as a tree. We reduce the irreducible truth into a parochial or convenient or popular sachet disposable in form and limited in content and most deleteriously toxic as residue from which new problems emerge. *Parasparam bhavayanthaha shreyah param avapsyatha*—'May we complement each other and nurture each other and that will take us all to the heights of fulfilment' (Gita, 3.11) was the management thinking to create synergies in ancient times. Today we see this when companies have widened the embrace of their key stakeholders from employees to vendors.

One of the paradigms of today's management is creation of teams of high performance. Whilst it is central to success, it fails in many cases because it aims to make competencies homogenous undermining the maxim that lasting results stem from healthy complementarities. A good communicator is only as successful as a good implementer who corroborates the practicality of the communicator's imagination. This is the heart of management where we see in everyone one repository of utility or value and when kindled he immortalizes himself.

The Master Manager

We see how Bhagavan Krishna employed this to the fraction by aligning the different

temperaments or personality constructs of the Pandavas to specific contexts that demanded it. A living proof of our scriptures was Sri Ramakrishna whose eternal legacy was sixteen direct disciples schooled by him into the immensity of Vedantic consciousness. The youngsters were varied personalities with equally contrasting inheritances. From a contemplative Swami Brahmananda to a living chapter of love Swami Premananda to the erudition of an illiterate Swami Adbutananda to the cyclonic go getter dynamo called Swami Vivekananda, they present diversity so emblematic of the world. Sri Ramakrishna without an iota of dilution funnelled the inherited and acquired personality footprints called in management as competencies in the same channel of expression. That is why Narendra spoke through penetrating words and Brahmananda through silence. The consummate painter in Sri Ramakrishna completes his *magnum opus* of sixteen disciples by chiselling their diversity into their predominating domain of strength but unifying all of them and their destinies by anchoring

it in the commonality of a relentless, ceaseless, egoless search for Truth.

This is the unwritten chapter the world of management and MBA courses would do well to learn from the Master in Dakshineswar Kali temple bereft of a strangulating rope of degrees but adorned with the liberating garland of freedom. That is why each of the sixteen disciples became independently absorbing pages in the history of Indian spiritual culture. They communicated the same truth in active idioms of their own personality fabric without any contradictions. How they could give clarity to the devotees to this day is legendary. The artist, the maker, the master, the manager in Sri Ramakrishna reveals itself.

Conclusion

Management is as much about managing ourselves as it is about others. A recognition of this truth is where one's ingenuity in managing becomes an aspect of his Value quotient. It becomes not an effort but a state. It is then not a discipline but a principle. A veritable confluence of India's timeless culture and concept. □



The Tradition of Indian Culinary

While cuisine deals with material ingredients, it has a deep connection with one's religious and cultural beliefs also. The Indian cuisine is rich and varied, thanks to variations in local culture, geographical location (proximity to sea, desert, or mountains) and economics. It also varies seasonally, depending on which fruits and vegetables are ripe. Given the range of diversity in soil type, climate and occupations, these cuisines vary significantly from each other and use of locally available spices, herbs, vegetables, and fruits. Indian food is also heavily influenced by religious and cultural choices.

Here are some samples of Indian culinary tradition, although it is encyclopedic in spread and variety:

Bengali cuisine is found in the states of Tripura, the Barak Valley of Assam, and West Bengal itself. Bengali cuisine has a high emphasis on the chilli pepper and tends to use high amounts of spice altogether. The cuisine is known for subtle flavours with an emphasis on fish, vegetables, lentils, and rice.

Tamil cuisine is characterized by its use of rice, legumes, and lentils, along with distinct aromas and flavours achieved by the blending of spices such as curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chilies, cinnamon, clove, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg and coconut. Tamil food is characterized by tiffins, which is a light food taken for breakfast or dinner and meals which are usually taken during lunch. Dosa and idli are some of the popular dishes and are eaten with chutney and sambar.

Goan cuisine is mostly seafood based; the staple foods are rice and fish. These are often served with coconut milk. The cuisine of Goa is influenced by its Hindu origins, four hundred years of Portuguese colonialism, and modern factors.

Gujarati cuisine is primarily vegetarian. The typical Gujarati thali consists of roti (rotli in Gujarati), daal or kadhi, rice, sabzi/shaak and papad. Many Gujarati dishes are simultaneously sweet, salty, and spicy. In mango season keri no ras (fresh mango pulp) is often an integral part of the meal.

Maharashtrian cuisine is known for the popular dishes such as puran poli, batata wada, masala bhat and wada pav. Shrikhand, a sweet dish made of strained yoghurt, is a main dessert of Maharashtrian cuisine. The cuisine of Maharashtra can be divided into two major sections—the coastal and the interior. The Konkan, on the coast of the Arabian Sea has its



own type of cuisine, a homogeneous combination of Malvani, Goud Saraswat Brahmin, and Goan cuisines. In the interior of Maharashtra, the Vidarbha and Marathwada areas have their own distinct cuisines.



Orissa cuisine relies heavily on local ingredients. Flavors are usually subtle and delicately spiced. Fish and other seafood, such as crab and shrimp, are very popular. Panch phutana, a mix of cumin, mustard, fennel, fenugreek and kalonji is widely used for flavoring vegetables and dals.

Punjabi cooking uses generous amounts of ghee, butter and cream, while home-cooked equivalents center around whole wheat, rice, and other ingredients flavored with masala. Many of the most popular elements of Anglo-Indian cuisine, such as tandoori foods, naan, pakoras and vegetable dishes with paneer, are derived from Punjabi styles.

Rajasthani cuisine is strongly influenced by the arid geography. Because water is scarce, food is generally cooked in milk or ghee, making it quite rich. Gram flour is a mainstay of Marwari food mainly due to the scarcity of vegetables in the area. Food that could last for several days and be eaten without heating is preferred. Major dishes of a Rajasthani meal may include daal-baati, tarfini, raabdi, panchkoota, chaavadi, kadhi and boondi.

Uttar Pradesh cuisine consists of Awadhi and Mughlai cuisine, though a vast majority of the state is vegetarian, preferring dal, roti, sabzi, and rice. Pooris and kachoris are eaten on special occasions. Chaat, samosa and pakora, among the most popular snacks in India, originate from Uttar Pradesh.

Thus one finds rich cultural variety in culinary traditions of India. □

Two Approaches

Two nations of yore, namely the Greek and the Aryan, placed in different environments and circumstances—the former, surrounded by all that was beautiful, sweet, and tempting in nature, with an invigorating climate, and the latter, surrounded on every side by all that was sublime, and born and nurtured in a climate which did not allow of much physical exercise—developed two peculiar and different ideals of civilisation. The study of the Greeks was the outer infinite, while that of the Aryans was the inner infinite; one studied the macrocosm, and the other the microcosm. Each had its distinct part to play in the civilisation of the world. Not that one was required to borrow from the other, but if they compared notes both would be the gainers. The Aryans were by nature an analytical race. In the sciences of mathematics and grammar wonderful fruits were gained, and by the analysis of mind the full tree was developed. In Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and the Egyptian neo-platonists, we can find traces of Indian thought.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 3:346

Indian Cultural Values and Economic Development

P. KANAGASABAPATHI

India's Traditional Economic Systems

India is an ancient civilization with outstanding contributions in diverse fields of life. Many people seem to acknowledge the fact that India was a pioneer in economic initiatives and remained the dominant economic power at the global level for several centuries. Long periods of domination by alien forces, especially of the Europeans for about two hundred years, resulted in the systematic destruction of the time-tested Indian social and economic systems that were in vogue. With the introduction of the new education system during the early nineteenth century, the British laid the foundation to disconnect the elite and the educated sections from their roots. As a result modern India finds it difficult to understand itself and connect itself to the realities. Besides, the imposition of western ideas over the years has created an impression that India does not have the fundamentals to function on her own. It is a plain fallacy.

Western models of economics are not the only way of looking at the way an economy runs. The fact is that the recent global developments confirm the failure of western models of economics. Western experts themselves admit that their economic and social models have largely failed. At the same

time, the slow and steady rise of India after independence shows that her functioning models are much better than those of the richer countries.

Pioneering Contribution of Ancient Indian Economy

India has a brilliant economic history. Ancient India was engaged in different economic activities. There were exclusive commercial cities and trade centres dominated by the merchant classes catering to the world markets, more than five thousand years ago. Evidences indicate that different forms of business organizations, including *shrenis* (ancient corporate forms) and partnerships, existed at least 2800 years ago. Economics, as a subject of science, is believed to have originated in India more than 2600 years ago. *Arthashastra*, the first book on economics in the world, underlined that the basis of wealth of the nation was economic activity and that the state should run a 'diversified economy.'

A Powerful Economy

Angus Maddison, an eminent writer on economics, shows that India remained as the economic super power for most of the time during the previous two millennia.¹ India



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had the highest share in the global economy, accounting for 32% of world GDP, during the beginning of the Common Era (CE). India continued to maintain her status as the premier economy and was dominating the world along with China till the nineteenth century. Even repeated invasions and the consequent disturbances could not affect her functioning much.

India Was Made Poor

It is a simple fact of history that the colonial rulers destroyed India systematically. Their fatal assault on the vital sectors of the economy and the drain of resources had completely shattered India. The native systems



that were built up over the years lost their significance. As a result India was made a poor and underdeveloped country. India's share of global GDP came down to 4.2% in 1950. During 1950-51, about 45% of the people were living below poverty line; 18.3% was the literacy rate and the average age of life was just 32.1 years.² Industrial and business sectors were very weak. Most of the people were dependent on agriculture which had become unviable several decades ago.

Emergence Despite Obstacle

Now, after sixty-five years of Independence, India is fast emerging as a crucial player in the global order. She is widely recognized as a potential nation possessing the capacity to reach the premier position in the coming years. The International Monetary Fund notes that India was the third largest economy in the world in 2011, with a GDP of \$4.46 billion.³ India remains the second fast growing nation after China. From being a poor country without much recognition in 1947, how did India become a nation commanding all round respect within a period of six decades? Almost all the estimates predict India to occupy a bigger space at the global level. How is this happening?

One has to remember that all these developments have been happening, despite the State adopting policies based on the ideologies evolved outside India. Initially, for more than thirty years, the socialistic ideology guided our policy makers and since the 1990s, the US-driven market capitalism continues to be their inspiration. Hence the development over the years remains uneven, with large sections of people facing serious difficulties in critical sectors such as agriculture. Poverty, inequalities and unemployment remain to be addressed seriously.

Yet India is progressing in spite of the confusions and contradictions at the top and the myriad problems surrounding her people. Studies reveal that it is mainly due to the functioning systems that are based on stronger foundations.

Cultural Values As the Bedrock of Economy

India's greatest asset is her cultural backgrounds. The traditional institutions of close-knit families and societies are the products of our culture. Hard work, frugal

living, high rates of saving, higher levels of entrepreneurship, higher social capital and relationship-based activities are all part of our value systems that remain as the foundations of the economy. Indian culture is inclusive and treats everyone as part of the larger family. Faith, goodwill, integrity, mutual understanding, norms and ethics are the basic elements of Indian life that have impact on the activities of our people, including the economic transactions.

Family, Community and Traditional Values

Families are the basic social, cultural and economic units in India. They are the prime source of savings in the country. These savings are the basis for all the productive and entrepreneurial activities. Indian families are built on relationships based on love, affection, faith, dedication and sacrifice. For much of the economic initiatives, families remain the source of inspiration, providing the entrepreneurs the much needed support during the crucial periods. Studies show that mothers, grandmothers, wives and sisters help accessing savings for entrepreneurial initiatives. As a result, major part of the initial investments comes from families, close circles and local sources. *Economic Census 2005* reveals that in about 95 percent of the instances, promoters mobilize funds through their families and own sources in the unorganized sector ⁴.

Communities function as extended families in different parts of the country. As a result, there is high social capital in the society. It enables economic transactions on the basis of mutual understanding, faith and goodwill. World Bank⁵ notes that the emergence of Tirupur, in Tamilnadu, as a global textile centre has been facilitated by the easy availability of funds at lower costs through

the system of 'credit rotation' during times of need. This is made possible due to the close relationships that prevail in local societies.

Self-employment and Entrepreneurship

Vidura, the wise man of Mahabharata, noted that 'self-employment is the best status in life'. Indian tradition considers self-employment as a virtue and accordingly it was given the highest status in society. The idea of self-employment is a distinctive feature of the Indian system. It is significant to note that in spite of changes in the economic and social structures over the years, self-employment remains the most preferred form of activity among Indians. The Project OASIS Report



notes that 53% of the total workforce in India is engaged in self-employment⁶. At the same time, the self-employment rate in all the richer countries was 16.8%, while it was 7.5% in the US.⁷

This indicates higher levels of entrepreneurial qualities prevailing in the Indian society. Quoting *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report 2003*, India Brand Equity Foundation notes, 'With more than 85 million businesses, India is one of the most

entrepreneurial countries in the world.⁸ *Economic Census 2005* notes that there were 41.83 million enterprises functioning in the unorganized sector with 100.90 million persons working. In 2009-10, there were more than 29 million units in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector. They together provide employment to more than 69.5 million persons.⁹

The Ministry of Company Affairs (Government of India) notes that there were nearly 8,73,000 companies at work during 2010.¹⁰ Earlier, the Ministry of Small Scale Industries had estimated that there were 2042 business clusters functioning across the country.¹¹ Many of these clusters such as in Surat, Ludhiana, Agra, Tirupur and Kanpur play a significant role at the global level.

Self-made, Self-financing and not State Dependent

Let us also mention that the family-based non-corporate sector contributes about 57% to the national output. The promoters of much of these enterprises are ordinary people from humble backgrounds, with lesser qualifications. A study of diamond exporters in Gujarat showed that around 66% of them have studied less than fifth standard.¹² But these are the people who dominate their fields at the national and global levels.

They have mastered businesses, technology and management through dedication, experience and native wisdom. As a result, they compete with the mega corporations at the international markets and succeed. Their business models are entirely local. Theirs businesses are self-made, self-financing and not dependent on the State. Studies show that more than 95% of the corporate sector is family-based. During the recent periods, an increasing number of Indian companies are going to many countries to play bigger roles.

Goodwill and Trust in Business Transactions

Despite mega scams that are reported in the media, it is still a fact that in the business transactions certain values are much adhered to. Most of the transactions in the non-corporate sector, which constitutes the major part of the Indian economy, take place on the basis of mutual trust and goodwill. In a study of the non-corporate finance sector in Karur, the textile export centre from Tamil Nadu, it was found that almost the entire financial transactions revolved around goodwill and faith.¹³

Not only in Karur, mutual understanding and higher value systems prevail across the country, irrespective of the backgrounds of the people. In his book, *Family Business in India*, Sudipt Dutta writes:

The cultural artifacts—the languages spoken, Gods worshipped and the numerous other details—differ from business community to business community across the country. But the value systems are surprisingly similar.¹⁴

Many studies in clusters reveal close personal relationships, cooperation and trust among businessmen from different religious communities. There are higher norms in practice in most of the industrial and business centres. Dwivedi presents in the context of Kanpur Saddlery cluster:

Norms function in the cluster, irrespective of the personal relationships that entrepreneurs have with each other and have an implication in providing stability to the entire cluster. We reported earlier that there are no legal contracts held among businessmen in this cluster. This practice seems to be based on normative behaviour rather than a matter of having personal experience with the other party. Even in case of new ties, a contract is not demanded because it is simply not considered a way to do business.¹⁵

Now, the Global Attention

India has been growing steadily over the years. She is one of the countries least affected by the recent global economic crisis. The Indian economic, business and management models are emerging at the global level in recent times. For example, several international institutions studied Arvind Hospitals (the famous eye-care hospital in Madurai) and Narayana Hridayalaya (the well-known cardiac-care hospital in

Bangalore) in order to emulate their practices in other countries. In this respect many foreign universities, management institutes and research organizations have been visiting India to study the Indian systems.

Culture—the Basis of Development

Decades ago, the Gandhian economist Kumarappa who wrote *Economy of Permanence*, noted that the Indian and Chinese civilizations had survived long as they were based on the values of permanence.¹⁸ He said further that our forefathers had laid down this kind of a foundation purposely with great vision. Studies prove his stand right. With her deep rooted values and traditions, India is surely poised to grow in economic development.

Many eminent economists and management experts of the West acknowledge that the foundations of Indian economic development lie in her culture and unique backgrounds. John Kenneth Galbraith, former ambassador of USA to India and an economist, noted: 'I wanted to emphasize the point, which would be widely accepted, that the success of India did not depend on the government. It depended on the energy, ingenuity and other qualifications of the Indian people. . . We've seen many years of Indian progress, and that is attributable to the energy and genius of the Indian people and her culture.'¹⁶

Recently a team of management professors led by Peter Cappelli from the Wharton Business School, USA, analyzed the leadership practices of Indian companies. Pointing out the superior practices in India, they note: 'The Indian leadership approach arose from the unique circumstances of the Indian economy and society.'¹⁷

This sums up the role of Indian Cultural values in economic development. □



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At most periods of her history India, though a cultural unit, has been torn by internecine war. ... Yet our overall impression is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and man, and of man and the state, so fair and humane. ... In all her history of warfare Hindu India has few tales to tell of cities put to the sword or of the massacre of noncombatants. ... There was sporadic cruelty and oppression no doubt, but, in comparison with conditions in other early cultures, it was mild. To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity.

—A L Basham, *The Wonder that Was India*, p.4

‘Do not Disrespect Food’

(*Annam Na Nindyat*)

The Indian Tradition of Respecting and Celebrating Food¹

PROBAL RAY CHOUDHURY

The Tradition of Giving Food

At the end of the great war of Kurukshetra, records *Bhavisyapurana*, Bhagavan Sri Krishna came to Yudhisthira, now king of Hastinapura, and spoke with great urgency: *dadasvannam dadasvannam dadasvannam yudhisthira* (‘Give food! Give food! Give food! O Yudhisthira’).

The great war of Kurukshetra had annihilated the political leadership of the country and left Indian polity in a vacuum. The polity was to be reorganized, the society resurrected, now that Dharma had been re-established with the victory of the Pandavas in the Great War. To achieve this *anna*, food—the basic sustenance for life—had to be ensured for one and all. On the advice of Sri Krishna, King Yudhisthira organizes the *asvamedha-yajna* and the Mahabharata records an extraordinary celebration of distributing food as a part of the sacred year-long rites and rituals. Order is re-established, people are satiated and contented, and the virtuous Yudhisthira is recognized worldwide as a *chakravarti*.

It is just not the Mahabharata alone, the Ramayana, the Dharmasastras, the Upanishads—all primary texts of Indian civilizational literature—lay unusual emphasis on the primary dharma of growing and

sharing food in plenty. Protected by defiant natural boundaries and nurtured by the bounties of Nature, India has from time immemorial, maintained its civilization with great opulence according to the precepts of dharma. Vast contiguous tracts of fertile lands unknown in world geography, a system of irrigation sustained by great rivers, abundant rainfall and sunshine all over the land all round the year, seems to have connived together to sustain this opulence and bounty of Mother Nature in India. Hence, it is not unusual that Indian literatures would be celebrating the great abundance that it has been endowed with.

Feeding Others—A Sacred Cultural Value

It is in India that we look upon the guests, besides our mothers, fathers, and preceptors, as gods. Before laying the inviolable discipline of not letting anyone go un-fed and un-cared for from one’s door, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* proclaims,

*annam na nindyat. tadoratam. annam na paricaksita. tadoratam. annam bahu kurvita. tadoratam.*²

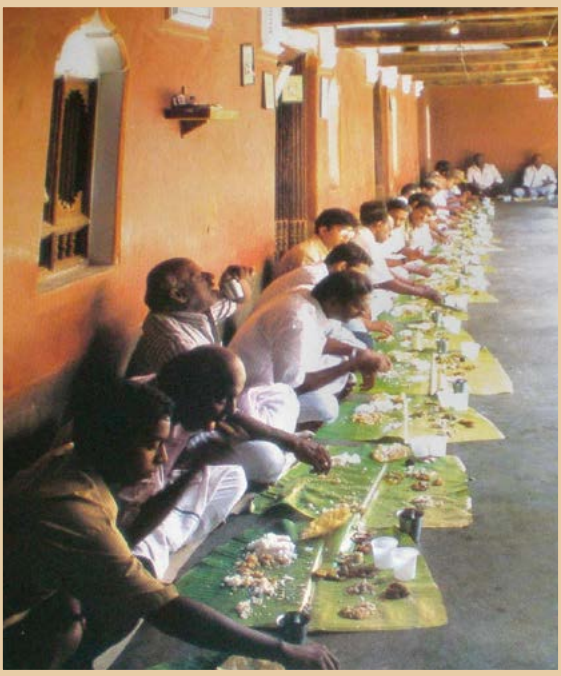
Do not look down upon *anna*. That is the inviolable discipline of life for one who knows. Do not neglect *anna*. That is the inviolable discipline of life for one who knows. Multiply



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anna many-fold. Endeavour so that there be a great abundance of food. That is the inviolable discipline of mankind.

Having been bound by such an explicit Dharmika discipline, it was but natural for the celebrated kings of classical Indian literature to be perpetually engaged in ensuring and organizing an abundance of food in their land and liberally sharing it amongst their people.



The Apastamba Dharma-sutra proclaims that it is the primary duty of the king to ensure that none within his domain suffers from hunger, want or deprivation.

Many of our celebrated books, the Mahabharata in particular, recalls in an emphatic manner the greatness of food and the giving of food. While it opens with the Rajasuya-yajna of Yudhisthira, king of Indraprastha,

it ends with the Asvamedha-yajna—again of Yudhisthira. The Asvamedha-yajna is occasioned by Sri Krishna's advice after the long discourse that Bhishma, the Kuru grandsire, offers to Yudhisthira, who has emerged victorious in the Great War, and is now king of Hastinapura.

Bhishma, during his long discourse to Yudhisthira on Raja-dharma [the duties of a king] repeatedly emphasises the duty of the king to ensure that within his domain agriculture is well taken care of, that peasants are not oppressed by unjust taxations, and the irrigation of their fields is not left merely upon the mercy of the rain god, so that there is always an abundance of food all around and nobody anywhere has to sleep on a hungry stomach.

Bhishma warns Yudhisthira that the hunger of even one person in a kingdom renders the life of the king forfeit. He further says,

When young children eagerly watch the delicious meals of others, and are not offered the same food with all ceremony and care, what indeed can be a sin greater than that? . . . A king in whose kingdom even one *snataka* (a person formally equipped in the learning of his discipline) suffers from hunger, that nation stops prospering and the kingdom is lost to others.

The author of Mahabharata describes with great passion the background preparations and the celebrations of these two great sacrifices which were attended not only by the great kings from far and near, but also by the common people from distant and sundry places. But what catches the imagination of the readers in the description of the great yajnas offered by Sage Vyasa, is the magnanimous scale of *annadana* [generous distribution of food] that is organized and ensured for one and all.

Bhimasena, the second Pandava, and the most accomplished cook of his times, whose reputation rivalled that of the legendary cook Nala, was directly responsible for this great Annadana and he personally supervised everything. It was the instruction of King Yudhishthira that Bhima should personally and continuously supervise the feeding of all who graced the yajna. The epic describes how Bhima accomplished his task, while no one was left hungry or in sorrow, none was to be found in a state of destitution or misery; everyone was happy, satiated and contented. 'Give, keep giving! Serve, keep serving!' were the sounds, apart from that of the drums and conches, that were heard unceasingly through day and night from the Yajna area. Those, who had come from different countries and distant lands to that great yajna, kept talking for long about the great festivity and celebration of food they had witnessed.

Much like Veda Vyasa in the Mahabharata, Maharshi Valmiki in Ramayana also describes the yajnas of the great kings Dasharatha and Sri Rama. Like Mahabharata, Ramayana also opens and closes with the description of a yajna. One of the greatest yajnas described in Indian literature is the Asvamedha-yajna of Sri Ramachandra that marks the culmination of his reign. Valmiki describes the large and complex preparations that were undertaken under the orders of Sri Rama to ensure the successful completion of his yajna. The highlight of yajna is the great feeding that is organized in the Naimisharanya even before the commencement of the yajna proper. The feeding is so abundant and sumptuous that amongst the multitude gathered in Naimisharanya there is not one who looks emaciated, downcast or distressed. Everyone present in that great *yajna* seems to exude well-being; everyone is well-fed, well-

nourished and in high cheer. The ultimate tribute Sage Valmiki pays this yajna is that, throughout the period of a year and more that the yajna lasts, nothing is ever found wanting there. Such is the greatness of Sri Rama, and such is the greatness of the Annadana that takes place in his yajna.

Growing and Sharing Food

Thus we see that the primary texts of Indian civilizational literature lay unusual emphasis on the primary dharma of growing and sharing food in plenty. The texts insist that a householder, before sitting down to partake food, must first ensure that all living beings around have been properly fed and all aspects of creation have been propitiated. In the Indian society, the king is the supreme householder and sits at the apex of the polity, thereby organizing and governing it. The texts also present the act of eating for oneself without first feeding others, of enjoying food while others remain hungry, as an existential sin which cannot be expiated by any means.

The texts enjoin upon the householders the primary duty of serving anyone who comes seeking their hospitality. This, they say, is the inviolable discipline for the one who knows. Therefore, the Shastras direct everyone to exert great efforts to ensure an abundance of food; and always welcome the guests with the announcement that food is ready.

The Shastras further declare that the one who prepares and gives food in abundance, with care and veneration, obtains food in abundance with the same care and veneration. The Smritis enjoin upon the householders to propitiate the Devas, the Rishis, the ancestors (*pitris*), the *bhutas*, and the guests, first with reverential offering of food, and only then partake for themselves of what is left over. A householder who cooks for himself alone does

not partake of food, but partakes merely of sin. For the wise one, the left-over of the Panchamaha-yajna—of what has been shared with all—alone is proper food.

Annadana in Historical Perspective

The spirit of the Indian civilization guided the Indian mind for ages. The great kings of India tried to organize and ensure abundance much in the lines of their ancient counterparts. History tells how the great Gupta Emperor, Samudragupta, organized his Asvamedha-yajna allowing great sharing of food and other gifts amidst tumultuous celebrations to people all over his great empire. From the records left by the Chinese scholar-traveller Huen Tsang we get to hear the large yajna conducted by Harshavardhana, one of the most revered kings of India, every few years at Prayag during the occasion of the Kumbha Mela. The king just emptied his treasury and distributed all the accumulated riches of the empire amongst the people. He even gave away his royal jewels and garments, and after having done so, he would beg from his sister a piece of second-hand garment. This account of Harshavardhana's great yajna reads much like the yajnas of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Thus we see that the discipline of sharing was not merely enshrined in the literary epics of the ancient age and the period that followed it, it was enshrined at the core of the Indian polity and guided the practice of the kings.

The discipline of sharing food before partaking of it oneself was taught by the Rishis and practised by the kings, and the common place householder in India. It became an indelible part of our lore and polity. India, for ages, in all her multifarious regions and cultures, continued to follow the discipline of sharing before eating.

However, with the Indian civilisation getting eclipsed from about the twelfth century of the Common Era in many parts of North India, Indians had to forego much of their classical and ancient disciplines. As the Indian kings lost the status of sovereigns in medieval times, they forfeited their right to organize yajnas as laid down in our sacred classical literature. Instead, many of them, especially in the Mithila-Banga region [today's Bengal and Bihar], started worshipping the Great Goddess in autumn, during the Navaratri, when the rich harvest of the great plains blessed by the mighty River Ganga were brought home. The Durga Pujas of these kings, which were organized in the spirit of the classical yajnas, would see great Annadana as a sacred ritual forming the core of the festivities. People from far and near would travel to the royal households to take part in the fortnight long festivities and return home satiated and contented.

A special mention may be made here of the efforts sustained for centuries by the Maratha kings of Thanjavur. A large part of the coastal lands and port-duties in Thanjavur, it seems, was assigned to Chatrams and Mathams—the traditional institutions of hospitality and learning prevalent in the Tamil lands, which were managed by the queens of the royal households.

Things took a drastic turn with the onset of the British rule as scarcity replaced opulence. Within a decade of the British becoming the administrators of Bengal, the opulent land of Bengal faced scarcity unknown in the history of India. The great famine of Bengal which lasted from 1769 to 1773, was such a catastrophic event that saw one in every three persons in Bengal perishing in the famine. To help the people in his zamindary during this great distress, Maharaja

Krishnachandra Ray of Nadia is said to have organized a legendary festival of Goddess Durga hitherto unseen or unheard in later times in Bengal. He opened the doors of his granary to assuage the hunger of his people, when agriculture and harvest had both failed. Many great landlords of Bengal of the time emulated this great Raja's example, and many a people in Bengal was thus saved. However, during the British rule in India, the per capita level of food grains in India were either pegged at the near-famine or famine levels.

The British administrators went a step further. The Governor General of East India Company ordered stopping of largesse that were organized as part of Hindu festivals. Indians were made to forget the traditions of their ancestors. The memory faded gradually, and the society strayed from the discipline.

The people of India, however, seem to have continued to follow the discipline of sharing up to recent times. The accounts of the early British administrators mention of the flourishing institutions of hospitality and sharing that they saw all throughout India, not merely in the centres of pilgrimage, but even in ordinary villages and in the midst of important roads.

The Principle of 'Others First'

After all, the Indian tradition had proclaimed Anna as the first manifestation of the Brahman (*annam brahmeti vyajanat*). It is the primacy of Anna and Annadana—of food and sharing of food—that sustains the Dharmachakra, the circle of Dharma. The

insistence of the Indian scriptures on the inviolable discipline of feeding before eating for oneself follows from the basic Indian understanding of the universe as a great cycle of give and take between different aspects of creation.

Whatever is earned or produced by man is in fact taken from other aspects of creation and it may rightfully be consumed only after returning the shares of all, only after propitiating and fulfilling all other aspects of creation. The Bhagavad Gita (3.12) puts it as stealing who consumes for oneself without having thus propitiated others. The Gita further explains that Brahman, the creator, while initiating this great cycle of the universe, enjoins upon human beings to keep it moving through yajna, disciplined action that propitiates and fulfils all aspects of creation. The one who does not keep this cycle of give and take moving, is a sinner immersed merely in the pleasures of the senses. The living of such a one is a waste.

An Urgent Need to Revive the Tradition

Unfortunately, modern India has been deeply negligent in following these basic disciplines of Indian tradition. Today hunger of the poor and the un-cared for in India is a reality that cannot be ignored. The negligence of traditional values has also led to sharp decline in agricultural cultivation itself. The situation can change only when we again excel in agriculture and ensure an abundance of food-grains, as well as restore the discipline of sharing in plenty. □



References

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The material for this article is drawn from the book, <i>Annam Bahu Kurvita: Recollecting the Indian Discipline of Growing and Sharing Food in Plenty</i>, co-authored by Jitendra Bajaj and Mandayam | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Doddamane Srinivas, published by the Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai, in 1996, which may be consulted for original citations and references. 2. <i>Taittiriyaopanishad</i>, 3.9 |
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Core Aspects of Indian Culture

KS VISWANATH

The word 'culture' is derived from the Latin root *cultura*, which means 'cultivation'. Culture, thus, refers to a set of information, knowledge, wisdom, languages, customs, traditions, ideology and attitudes that assist in cultivating those aspects in the human nature to make him evolved, selfless and ideal.

To become cultured person is a natural urge in human beings. We must also be able to find in every time-period in history, and at every region in the world, a culture from which we can learn. In this context, we need to ask ourselves the important question: Is there something we can learn from the Indian culture? We shall try to understand the unique ways in which India has contributed to the world culture.

Looking Inward rather than Outward

One can safely conclude that the practice of meditation, i.e., the art of looking inward, originated from the Indian culture. Verses from the Vedas and seals from the Indus valley civilization corroborate this. The key idea here is to try to understand the nature of our own mind and self. This process has led to the discovery of several profound truths in nature. Such discoveries have not only strengthened Hinduism, but have also led to the development of other Dharmic religions like Buddhism and Jainism.

One of the greatest discoveries made is that man is beyond his ego, and that he is

essentially a divine being. This has been the foundation for many of the principles in Indian culture. One such principle is that one can be a lamp unto himself, and this had made spiritual aspirants to be independent seekers of truth rather than being believers in a dogma.

This naturally leads to extensive logical reasoning about the nature of self and the world. We can find a myriad of philosophical traditions in attestation of this. Thus, India is one of the very few cultures where there have been extensive questioning and logical reasoning to attain the Truth. This also fostered a very liberal atmosphere, where people were allowed to follow their beliefs as they wished. Consequently, we can see in India even today many sects and religions living in peace and complementing each other.

Renunciation and Service

Another aspect of Indian culture is its idea of not claiming anything as our own. Everything belongs to God. The result is that one can be unselfish and be concerned for others' happiness. Thus, India has never been a country greedy to conquer other countries for material benefits. Hu Shih, former Ambassador of China to USA, said, 'India conquered and dominated China culturally for twenty centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border.'

Another key aspect of the India's contribution to the world culture is the grand

□ The author is a young professional in a corporate in Mumbai.

philosophy of service and unselfishness. From a description of the saints of India, one can clearly see that they were men of tremendous compassion, and love for others. This was one of the important virtues required to be cultured. Living with an ideal to put the priorities of the family above the individual, state above the family and nation above the state is an important part of this exercise.

Karma Yoga

Influenced by their introspective nature, the Indian sages questioned and analyzed their motives and actions. They discovered the law of Karma, according to which an individual's actions are responsible for what he receives from others. Therefore if one performs positive actions, one reaps the benefits in due course.

With this, the ideal of Karma Yoga evolved. The ideal of Karma Yoga is that one must carefully choose with unselfish intentions. Once this is done, one must diligently work for the cause, without getting anxious about results. After a detailed study of the human psychology, the Indian saints concluded that no action is superior or inferior by itself and that the intentions of actions are more important than the action itself.

Seeking Ultimate Truth

Indian culture has always given the highest priority to learn from Nature. One of the greatest maxims given for seekers of truth is that, 'Whatever is ultimately true must be so independent of time'. The central ideal of life should be such that it is applicable not just in the present, but also in future, no matter what the circumstance were or would be.

Their deep understanding of truth had also resulted in creation of value systems (*smritis*) and discoveries (*shrutis*), which stand the test of time. The greatest example

is Hinduism itself, which continues to survive while adapting to changes to time, for thousands of years. Some institutions within Hinduism itself which have survived the test of time are the Varnashrama system, the institution of arranged marriage, Vedic chanting, Indian epics, rituals in temples, Sanskrit language, literature, traditional learning of Vedanta and the institution of Sannyasa.

This was in spite of repeated foreign invasions by the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Persians, Portuguese and the British. Further, most foreign invaders had immense hatred and prejudice against the Hindu customs. On the other hand, the civilizations of Greek, Roman, Persian, Inca, Egyptian and Babylonian, who were at the peak in some point of history, have been unable to withstand the onslaught of time that they have become objects in museums. Swami Vivekananda remarks (CW, 3: 106),

Civilizations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient and modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another...But mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. . . Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, many other nations have taught; but India for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist. . . Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. . .!

In the light of above, one can appreciate the tenacity with which the sages held on to truth and helped in designing systems, which would withstand the test of time.

Quest for Knowledge:

Any impartial student of Indian culture can observe a big fountain of knowledge in the Indian culture. As Indians themselves value spiritual knowledge over other forms of knowledge, one can find extensive number of works in the Indian culture focusing on spiritual knowledge based on lives of men who have lived a truthful life. The classical works on philosophy are Vedanta, Yoga, Sankhya, Mimamsa, Buddhism and Jainism. In the modern works, lectures of Swami Vivekananda, and lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Ramana Maharishi, etc., have reinvigorated Indian culture.

Indian culture has in no way given a lesser priority to secular knowledge. The great spiritual saints also deeply studied secular sciences, as material development is a part of total development. Says A. L. Basham, the well-known Indologist,

Indian theories lacked an empirical base but they were brilliant imaginative explanations of the physical structure of the world, and in a large measure, agreed with the discoveries of modern physics.

Thus we find Taxila, recognized as the oldest university in the world, which had around 10,000 students where 60 subjects were taught. Some of the contributions include:

- ❖ Mathematics: Discovery of zero and modern decimal system, trigonometry, Pythagoras theorem
- ❖ Science: Atomism
- ❖ Ayurveda: Earliest school of medicine
- ❖ Surgery: Knowledge of anesthesia and cataract and plastic surgeries.

❖ Navigation: An advanced knowledge of boat making and navigation.

❖ Astronomy: Calculation of eclipses, earth's circumference, heliocentric theory of gravitation

❖ Great diversity in music and dance shows a very refined sense of taste of the Indian culture.

Observing the historical monuments in India, we can also see the knowledge of metallurgy and architecture our ancients had.

India has been among the top three economically strong nations from 0 CE till 1700 CE, before the British plunder of India (which is well-documented) and due to other global factors. This persistent dominance in the economic front historically can be attributed to the use of natural resources like land, water, vegetation and mines in a sustainable manner. Also, wealth was generated in the villages, which supported the towns and that it was not acquired by plundering any other region. In the subject of polity, we also find the roots of ideas of democracy in the Indian culture.

Conclusion:

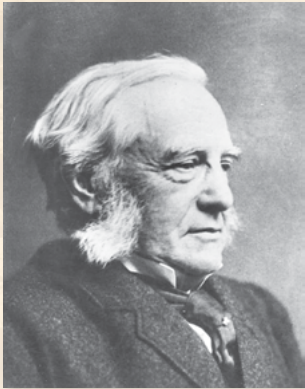
India has a long history, gifted with geniuses in all walks of life. There are sufficient reasons for any Indian to be proud of it. Swami Vivekananda opined that one can contribute effectively to the nation and attain inner peace only when one's ideals are aligned with the national ideals. It would be very tough to flow against the tide flowing for thousands years of our history. It is, therefore, important to recognize ourselves as a part of this historical culture, which would help us in understanding ourselves better. Only with this understanding, can we understand the world around us.

Any attempt to supplant our latent ideals with ideals contrary from other parts of the worlds would be destructive and perilous. □

What They Say About Indian Culture

Quotes from Eminent Persons

If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some



of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions to some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should

point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw the 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. . . again I should point to India.

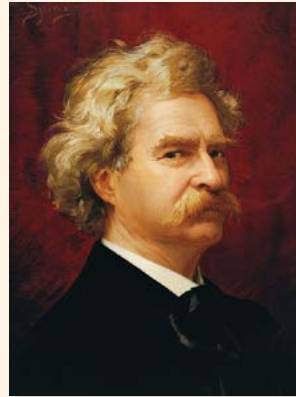
—**MAX MUELLER**, GERMAN SCHOLAR AND INDOLOGIST,
IN INDIA: WHAT CAN IT TEACH US (1882) LECTURE IV

We owe a lot to the Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made.

—**ALBERT EINSTEIN**, THE MOST WELL-KNOWN SCIENTIST OF
20TH CENTURY

The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants,

the cobra and the jungle, the country of hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of traditions, whose yesterday's bear date with the modern antiquities for the rest of nations—the one sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one



land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined.

India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace

of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grand mother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only.

India has two million gods, and worships them all. In religion all other countries are paupers; India is the only millionaire.

—**MARK TWAIN**, AMERICAN NOVELIST AND WRITER

India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages:

she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of



the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all.

It is true that even across the

Himalayan barrier India has sent to the west, such gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and above all numerals and the decimal system.

— **WILL DURANT**, AMERICAN HISTORIAN

If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.

— **ROMAIN ROLLAND**, FRENCH SCHOLAR AND NOBEL LAUREATE

India, the land of Vedas, the remarkable works contain not only religious ideas for a perfect life, but also facts which science has proved true. Electricity, radium, electronics, airship, all were known to the seers who founded the Vedas.

— **WHEELER WILCOX**, AMERICAN POET

After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense.

— **W. HEISENBERG**, GERMAN PHYSICIST

In the great books of India, an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence, which in another age and climate

had pondered and thus disposed of the questions that exercise us.

— **R.W. EMERSON**, AMERICAN AUTHOR

At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength.

— **JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**, INDIA'S FIRST PRIME MINISTER

India conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border.

— **HU SHIH**, FORMER AMBASSADOR OF CHINA TO USA

There are some parts of the world that, once visited, get into your heart and won't go. For me, India is such a place. When I first visited, I was stunned by the richness of the land, by its lush beauty and exotic architecture, by its ability to overload the senses with the pure, concentrated intensity of its colors, smells, tastes, and sounds... I had been seeing the world in black & white and, when brought face-to-face with India, experienced everything re-rendered in brilliant technicolor.

— **KEITH BELLOWS**, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Whenever I have read any part of the Vedas, I have felt that some unearthly and unknown light illuminated me. In the great teaching of the Vedas, there is no touch of sectarianism. It is of all ages, climbs, and nationalities and is the royal road for the attainment of the Great Knowledge. When I read it, I feel that I am under the spangled heavens of a summer night.

— **HENRY DAVID THOREAU**, AMERICAN THINKER AND AUTHOR

It is impossible not to be astonished by India. Nowhere on earth does humanity present itself in such a dizzying, creative

burst of cultures and religions, races and tongues. Enriched by successive waves of migration and marauders from distant lands, every one of them left an indelible imprint which was absorbed into the Indian way of life. Every aspect of the country presents itself on a massive, exaggerated scale, worthy in comparison only to the superlative mountains that overshadow it. It is this variety which provides a breathtaking ensemble for experiences that is uniquely Indian. Perhaps the only thing more difficult than to be indifferent to India would be to describe or understand India completely. There are perhaps very few nations in the world with the enormous variety that India has to offer. Modern day India represents the largest democracy in the world with a seamless picture of unity in diversity unparalleled anywhere else.

—A ROUGH GUIDE TO INDIA

Where can we look for sages like those whose systems of philosophy were prototypes of those of Greece: to whose works Plato, Thales and Pythagorus were disciples? Where do I find astronomers whose knowledge of planetary systems yet excites wonder in Europe as well as the architects and sculptors whose works claim our admiration, and the

musicians who could make the mind oscillate from joy to sorrow, from tears to smile with the change of modes and varied intonation?

—COLONEL JAMES TODD

There has been no more revolutionary contribution than the one which the Indians made when they invented ZERO.

—LANCELOT HOG BEN IN MATHEMATICS FOR THE MILLIONS

Our present knowledge of the nervous system fits in so accurately with the internal description of the human body given in the Vedas (5000 years ago). Then the question arises whether the Vedas are really religious books or books on anatomy of the nervous system and medicine.

—B.G. RELE, IN THE VEDIC GODS

The surgery of the ancient Indian physicians was bold and skilful. A special branch of surgery was dedicated to rhinoplasty or operations for improving deformed ears, noses and forming new ones, which European surgeons have now borrowed.

—SIR W. HUNTER, BRITISH SURGEON

An examination of Indian Vedic doctrines shows that it is in tune with the most advanced scientific and philosophical thought of the West.

SIR JOHN GEORGE WOODROFFE, BRITISH ORIENTALIST



'I Love India. . .'

I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illumined consciousness of her great sons—Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma: Brahma is Wisdom, Brahma is Infinite; Shantam Shivam Advaitam: Peace is in Brahma, goodness is in Brahma, and the unity of all beings. . . What India truly seeks is not a peace which is in negation, or in some mechanical adjustment, but that which is in Sivam, in goodness; which is in Advaitam, in the truth of perfect union

—Rabindranath Tagore