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INDIAN CULTURE AND SELF EMANCIPATION

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Abstract:

There is a need to stress the relevance and significance of the core aspects of our culture and traditions among our youth. This is where the role of education comes in. Only an acquaintance with our history, rational customs, glorious traditions and lineage of our ancestors will definitely give the youth a motivation and inspiration to assimilate the eternal values that Indian Culture embodies.

Keywords: culture, India, emancipation, customs, etc

First of all, let us try to understand the word ‘culture’. This word is widely used as the equivalent of the Sanskrit term ‘Samskriti’ so, it is better to ponder on its connotation and implications. The verbal root kr (Sanskrit word- means ‘to do’) gives rise to several nouns when associated with certain prefixes. Out of these, there are three words which have a direct bearing on our present subject: 1 Prakirti i.e. basic matter 2 Samskriti i.e. refined matter or condition 3 Vikriti i.e. decaying matter or condition. We can explain this as a block of stone is Prakirti. When the same stone is sculptured into a beautiful image, it becomes Samskriti. And when the image is broken then it is called Vikriti. Culture is the art of living. Since time immemorial, culture refers to the faiths, religions, customs, traditions, practices, languages, ceremonies, art and architecture, music and dance and more importantly the values that are centred on an individual’s way of life.

The word ‘cultivation’ is also derived from the same Latin root, as generally applied to the cultivation of crops from the earth, involves several agrarian processes such as tilling and preparing the ground, sowing seeds, watering and so on. This will ultimately result in a good crop. Does this word also not fit in very well with the concept of Samskriti? Sanskrit word ‘Samskara’

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also refers to the process of cultivating, preparing or refining- though the word Samskara also refers to an impression on the mind of every action one does.

Indian culture is generally considered as a blend of diverse sub-cultures that are spread all over this subcontinent. It is due to India's unity in diversity that our culture has had a profound influence the world over and it is accepted as being tolerant, accommodating, open-minded, sacred, secular yet spiritual and predominantly concerned with common human welfare. The total credit for having applied the underlying principle of unity in diversity that has produced a common culture despite an amazing pluralistic society belongs to our forefathers-our ancient seers, sages, religious leaders and great philosophers. It is now the responsibility of the youth of India to preserve the ancient culture at the time when scientific advancements, technological developments and fast transformation to the westernised way of life keep their minds preoccupied. And at the same time, it becomes prerequisite to save our culture for Indian youth.

Indian culture is based on Vedanta Philosophy which believes in the divinity of man, the divine unity of all the creation. It also advocates the fundamental unity of all religions as it believes that Truth is one, sages call it by many names. This philosophy of Vedanta needs to be placed before the humanity so that the humankind could live like a world fraternity. The greatest need of humans at present is mutual love, compassion and cooperative action which alone can bring emancipation, long-lasting peace, well-being and prosperity to all the human beings and nations.

Let us discuss a few important points of Indian culture and how these tenets are helpful for self-emancipation. The first and foremost quality of Indian culture is love and respect for parents and elders, gratitude for teachers and good care of your fellow beings and guests are time and again emphasised in our culture and scriptures. In our Vedic verses, it is proclaimed that regard your mother, father, teacher and guest as God himself. This indeed formulates unique family values in our culture. The myth of Sharwana Kumar exemplifies the devotion of a son towards his parents. The great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata also present ethical values.

For generations, the Indian society has had the traditional joint family system, which has nurtured the value of sharing and caring, tolerant and helpful to one another. It is rather unfortunate that these values are losing their ground. The value-based traditions and practices are fast declining with the uprise of westernisation in general and American pragmatism in particular. It has been customary in our society to respect elders and bow down to them and seek blessings. The teacher-student tradition has been exemplary to the world. Teachers were held high in high reverence by students. Students learnt practical value-oriented lessons from the teachers by living with them in Gurukuls and serving them. The western professionalism has daunted this noble tradition. The traditional Gurukula system has ended up in today's much-debated modern educational system. So the value-learning institutions - joint family and gurukul had been

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disintegrated. Nuclear family system and modern school and colleges give birth to intolerance and self-centeredness.

Our ancient scriptures are the sources of Indian culture and cover the entire range of knowledge. These books teach us our duties from our birth to death, besides enumerating the values, virtues, morals and ethics that we are supposed to follow. The Vedas describe our obligations and responsibilities in all stages of our life – Brahmacharya (student life), Garhasthya (family life), Vanaprastha (retired life), and Sannyasa (preparation for salvation). This system helps man to achieve self-emancipation.

Scriptures such as the Upanishads, through the conversation between a sage and his disciple, not only speak about faith and the ultimate goal of human life but also spell out the quality and traits that are required of a young man. Epics like Ramayana and 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 outlined the laws, rules and codes of conduct, applicable to individuals, communities and nations. Bhartrihari's Neeti Shastra 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.

The duty-first value system is an important positive aspect of Indian culture which needs to be highlighted. This implies that in this modern age of representative government and Rule of Law, the government and its agencies should perform their duties well and faithfully so that the citizens can enjoy their rights. Indian culture never saw the individual and society as antagonistic to each other. Indian vision was that of an orderly society, with each individual doing his assigned job. The individual and society were viewed as two complementary and incomplete entities tied to a relationship of mutual obligations, a commitment which was essential to ensure the well-being of all. Those who acted as the guardians of society and worked out the delicate nuances and detailed network of the social order were neither concerned about, nor even conscious of, the concept of human rights. They were more commercial about the moral dimension of a human being's activities than the legal aspect. Much emphasis was placed on the understanding of society from a moral perspective.

Indian Culture teaches us that a man performs two types of actions: 1) Actions in fulfilment of desires 2) Actions performed in a spirit of duty and dedication. Actions motivated by desires are like the shackles that bind. They cause the mind to burn in the duality of likes and dislikes. They raise ever new desires and carvings. They strengthen the ego and cause pangs of adversity. Actions motivated by desires promote attachments. They increase selfishness and lead to continuous dissatisfaction. But the actions performed in a spirit of duty leads to supreme bliss.

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The doer gives up the doer-ship. He performs all actions in the will of God. In the heart of his hearts, the doer has a strong faith in God. He frees himself from the duality of pains and pleasures, loss or gain, enemy and friend. He sees God as a moving force behind all activities. He sees the result in His will. Ego and cleverness are given up and humility and the path of welfare are adopted. Endeavour is made to win the friendship of all. The whole effort is to remove the suffering of others. The actions motivated by the sense of duty leads to self-emancipation.

Mahatma Gandhi once 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 environment-friendly culture. Our ancient seers saw nature as being the manifestation of God. Swami Vivekananda said, “All this which we see around us is the outcome of that consciousness of the divine.” Thus there was gratitude towards nature in India since the time immemorial. We regard everything around us as pervaded by a subtle divine presence- be it a river, mountain, lake, animal, flora or a star or planet. Our ancient sages and seers believed that Divine reality is expressed in every manifestation of matter.

The Indian culture is primarily Cosmo-centric, wherein man is considered to live as part of a system in which everything is related to everything else. This concept has been the basis of our scriptures. Actually, this principle is permeated by a reverence for all life, and awareness that the great forces of five elements i.e. air, water, fire, earth and sky without which life is not possible. The same idea permeates all forms of life including plants, trees, and animals are all bound to each other. Indian culture holds that it is our utmost duty to protect and nurture the vibrant nature. Even the a-biotic world has been perceived as a living creature with a soul. It is a very significant concept as it placed man as equal to every other element of our environment. The Indian thought greatly emphasizes a very cordial relationship among all the elements of our world. To highlight the importance of various components of our environment, various rituals have been institutionalized. These rituals ensured that we treated even the non-living world with great care and maintain harmony.

Fire is conceived as the messenger of God. Earth has been considered as mother goddess. The sky is worshipped as father. Earth worship manifested itself even in stone worship. Sun, water, plants, which are the very basis of human survival are worshipped. Trees that provide shelter, food, fuel and oxygen are called tree gods. They are considered worthy of worship. Some trees like Pipal, Banyan, Banana etc, are an integral part of our temples. Hymn IX of Book Ten of Rig Veda is dedicated to Water. The hymn recognizes the life-giving ability of water, not only physically but also spiritually. The prayer concludes that a plentiful supply of pure water is always available. So, it can be said that nature worship and nature preservation is an integral part of Indian culture. Ecology is an inherent part of Indian cultural ethos.

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Similarly, respect and conservation of wildlife is an inseparable part of Indian culture. The cow is revered as mother. Bull, snake and other animals are worshipped. Our seers formulated this culture on the principle that the guiding motive of mankind should be charity towards men, charity towards all animals. Vegetarianism has always been promoted in this culture. Consumerism is always shunted. With such a rich culture and heritage, where compassion and kindness were the very foundations of living style, there was no need for human right or animal welfare organisations. Our youth should be taught these values and be aware of the necessity of adoration and preservation of Mother Nature.

Ethics and values have guided the Indian economy and trade since ancient times. The age-old saving habit that prevails among us bearing in mind the need to conserve for future coupled with simple lifestyle has guarded us at the time of adversity. Our old proverbs, myths etc. suggest being watchful in spending the earnings. Simple lifestyle and emphasis on self-control are inherent in our culture. Here is a hymn from Isha Upanishad: "Everything in the universe belongs to the Supreme God. Therefore take only what you need, that is set aside for you. Do not take anything else, for you know to whom it belongs". Isha Upanishad also says: "Resources are given to mankind for their living. Knowledge of using resources is absolutely necessary."

Culture is the greatest asset of India. The traditional institutes of close-knit families and societies are the products of our culture. Hard work, frugal living, high rates of saving, entrepreneurship, higher social capital and relationship-based activities are all part of our value systems that remain as foundations of the Indian economy for ages. 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 an impact on all the activities of Indians but unfortunately, we are ignoring these tenets and moving far from self-emancipation.

Vidura, the wise man in Mahabharata, says 'self-employment is the best status in life.' In Indian culture self-employment is considered as virtue and accordingly, it was given the highest status in the society. The idea of self-employment is a distinctive feature of the Indian way of life. 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 this leads to self-emancipation.

Indian culture is family-oriented, society-oriented, and nature-oriented. On the contrary, western culture is individual-oriented. The family, society and nation get prominence over the individual in our culture where the service and sacrifice are considered as great virtues. On the other hand, individuals get prominence in western culture. Nature is considered divine in the Indian context and hence is revered but the west believes that nature is meant for enjoyment and for the consumption of man. Indian culture is moralistic and spiritualistic, based upon ethics and

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values whereas the western culture is materialistic. So, Indian youth should not blindly follow the western way of living which is being promoted through media on the name of development.

Swami Vivekananda said that the youth of India should imbibe renunciation and service in their character. Although scientific advancement and technical developments are essential for national progress but youth should be alert to the fact that such developments can profoundly affect the culture and traditions of society if left unchecked. It is the need of the hour 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 comes in. Values and ethics, rational customs, glorious traditions and lineage of our ancestors, will definitely give the youth inspiration and motivation to assimilate the eternal values that Indian culture embodies.

In Indian culture preference is given to wisdom. We generally confused with these two seeming similar words – wisdom and intelligence. But there is a difference. Intelligence is about skill technique and know-how, but the wisdom is connected with philosophy, ethics and spiritual cultivation. We can say that intelligence concentrates on methodology but wisdom on principle. Intelligence deal primarily with tangible material things we see and touch whereas wisdom is related to intangible subjects such as courage, devotion, faithfulness, patience, etc.

Intelligence is to the brain as wisdom to the mind; intelligence is to the body of a person while wisdom to soul. Intelligence is to be used, wisdom is to be attained. Experiments by the man on various things are in the fields of intelligence, but experiences by the man of spiritual and moral dimensions belong to the realm of wisdom. An intelligent man may be proud of his intelligence, but the wise man must humble. Intelligence searches facts wisdom truth. There are countless intelligent men but a handful of wise. Intelligence is only a tool that is to be used not only for good purpose but also for evil design. It is like a sharp knife that can be used to cut vegetables also for wounding and slaying somebody. Big crimes and intricate murders cannot be committed by unintelligent persons. Large scale tax evasions and embezzlement are executed very effectively by persons of high intelligence. History is full of those intelligent persons who successfully deceived countless fellow beings, started wars which killed numberless innocent and defenceless men, women and children.

The inadequacy of intelligence can also be noticed in day to day life. An intelligence engineer may not be a good husband, a caring son or a loving and responsible father. He may be intelligent enough to develop new software but at a social level not wise enough to save his relations and to make his family happy. A successful businessman can be unkind to his employees, a learned doctor may deceive his patients, and a learned professor may not put his heart in his lectures. Yet all these are the intelligent persons of society.

Today when we see around us we get astonished at the achievements that man got in various fields in recent years. The world of fantasy is here and now. Human intelligence appears

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to be unlimited. But at the same time, we felt that there is something absent in this progress. Why is there an increase in crime? The world of tomorrow is already here but peace and harmony are still far away. The great emphasis on intelligence and material perfection in the so-called modern world proves to be inadequate. Something is badly missing and that ‘something’ is wisdom. It is very painful to observe modern educational institutions all over the world are being engaged in training more intelligent persons to cater the needs of this machine-oriented planet whose days of survival are numbered unless wisdom is invoked. Only wisdom can turn intelligence from destructive aim to constructive goals. Wisdom cannot be used for wrong, unjust and selfish ends. Wisdom is always and forever good and just otherwise it is not wisdom at all. It is wisdom that leads to self-emancipation.

Since the time immemorial human being wants happiness. But the question is whether this happiness means joy or fun. There is a subtle difference between joy and fun. In Indian Culture fun is morally indifferent and spiritually empty whereas joy is morally intrinsic and spiritually inherent. Fun is predominately afflicted with excitement but joy is always associated with peace. Fun and joy conspire together whereas peace and joy go hand in hand. Fun is often sought as an end, joy is always a consequence. Indian Culture believes that unspeakable and crowning joy arrives when one overcomes temptation after incredible struggle and mental anguish. The joy of peace comes after one makes the right decision or a moral choice. Fun is only momentary satisfaction and it links not with either universal purpose or everlasting value while joy is forever integrated with truth and goodness. Joy is inseparable from life and eternity. Our ancient seers believed that the comfort, relief, peace and exaltation cannot be adequately described but can be fully experienced.

Indian Culture believes that all creatures exist, but only human beings live. The difference in the meaning of existence and living can be understood by the example of a comparison between house and home. The house represents existence but home represents living. The roof, the walls, the floor and all the furniture are related to house whereas husband, wife and children, their mutual love and respect are related to home. In this so-called modern age we are improving our existence but forgetting living. Existence is measured by the success in a materialistic term. Young generation wants a culture which can guarantee materialistic prosperity which is momentary. Indian culture that teaches morality, self-discipline, ethics, values, contentment can convert our existence into good living which gives freedom –ultimate and permanent. Physical, mental and spiritual freedom lies in good living rather than comfortable existence. Indian Culture teaches us good living.

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