CHAPTER 5

INDIAN CULTURE -
A COMPACT PROFILE

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5.1. CULTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Meaning of Culture

Culture is the most essential component of mankind. Several social scientists have tried to understand it. American anthropologist Herskovits[1] observed that whatever we see in the world is made up of two things - Nature and Culture. While Nature is God-made part of environment, Culture is the man-made part of environment. While Nature includes sun, wind, stars etc., culture includes tools and artifacts, ideas and inventions, traditions and values, and worldview.

According to Verma[2] "Culture is the source of the more-or-less spontaneous actions and reactions of a people and their mode of dealing with objective reality and subjective formations". In Sanskrit, *Sanskriti* (culture) means purified or refined". For Nehru[3] "Culture is the sum total of the people's endeavors." He asserts that "By culture .... I mean first of all what the anthropologists mean, the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. The culture is visible in their arts, in their social

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[1] Herskovits, M. J. *Cultural Anthropology.* New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1955.

[2] Verma, R.R. The Concept of Progress and Cultural Identity, in Deutsch, E. (Ed.). *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives.* Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994.

[3] Nehru, J. L., *Discovery of India.* London : Meredian Books. 1946

systems, in their habits and customs, and in their religion.... but things are simply the parts into which culture can be anatomised, as a human body can ... so culture is more than an assemblage of its arts, customs and beliefs".

5.2. CULTURE - SOME DEFINITIONS

The famous English poet Mathew Arnold defined culture in these words: "Culture is the acquainting by ourselves with the best, that has been known and said in the world".

However, sociologists consider such a definition too subjective to be accepted by them. MacIver and Page[4], well known sociologists define culture as "the realm of styles, of values, of emotional attachments, of intellectual adventures ... (It is) the antithesis of civilization. It is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and thinking, in our every day intercourse, in art, in literature, in religion, in recreation and enjoyment."

Taylor[5] observes that "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Shah[6] defines "Culture is that which is formed, shaped and moulded according to the inherent tendencies and mental outlooks, subject to time, place and circumstances factor which forms the basis of its entire political,

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[4] MacIver, R.M., and Page, C.H., *Society: An Introductory Analysis.* Madras: Macmillan India Ltd. 1950.
[5] Taylor, Sir E.B., *Primitive Culture.* New York : the American Anthropological Association. 1874.
[6] Shah, G.R., *Glimpses of Indian Culture.* New Delhi : Trishul Publications, 1991.

social, religious and economic activities and are expressed in the arts, sciences, literature, industry and crafts, which in turn reflect the rise and fall of that nation as and when it advances and derogates from the path of progress."

According to Nehru "Culture is "that which develops into a rich civilisation flowing out in philosophy, drama, literature, art, science and mathematics. Truly culture is the sum total of the peoples' endeavors in different fields of life."[7]

Etymologically, culture refers to the world 'in different fields of life' Deutsch[8] endorsed similar views when he observes that culture is derived from the Latin world 'agriculture' which means to till or to cultivate. Thus, culture is something cultivated over a period of time.

These various approaches to the understanding of culture commonly emphasise two features: That Culture is complex whole of values that embody thoughts and behaviour; and, that it is common way of life.

5.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

1. **Culture is learned:** It is not hereditary. It is not created by any one person. It is learnt and cultivated over a period of time by individuals as members of a society. According to Kroeber, "Culture is both super-organic and super-individual."

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[7] Nehru, J. L., *Op. Cit.*
[8] Deutsch, E., *Op. Cit.*

2. **Culture is social** : Culture can thrive only in society. It can not grow in isolation. It mirrors the social progress and development in any society.

3. **Culture is dynamic** : Culture, like time, is always in motion and is transmitted though a chain of customs, traditions, values, ideas, etc. The cultural heritage of community is ever changing, adapting and integrating new traits, losing some. It can not be freezed in time.

Claude Levi-Strauss[9], the well known French Anthropologist, rightly stresses that one culture has no absolute criteria for judging the activities of another culture as 'low' or noble'. Cultural relativism in no way implies normlessness for oneself or for one's society. Both what is 'rational' and what is 'ethical' depend on cultural value positions. For instance, from a value perspective it is difficult to defend that the trade in arms is less unethical than trade in drugs. One difference, as Hofstead[10] mentions is that in the drugs traffic the poor countries tend to be the sellers, in arms traffic the rich countries.

Culture as mental software

Culture is learnt, not inherited. It is according to sociologists, a complex system of values or one's preferences. Vales are among the first things children learn not consciously, but implicitly. Psychologists feel that by the age of 10 children acquire their basic values. Because these values are learnt very early they remain unconscious and subconscious deep within

[9] Levi-Strauss, C., as quoted in Hofstead, G., *Cultural Consequences*. London: Sage, 1980.
[10] Hofstead, G., *Op. Cit.*

them. They may both be explicit outwardly for observation. They have to be inferred through their various activities.

5.4. THE INDIAN CULTURE

Indian culture has evolved over a period about 8,000 years. Today it is a living factor in the lives of about one-fifth people of the globe, spread over a vast peninsula of two million square miles. Starting with the Upanishads of the great ascetics over eight centuries before Christ the Indian culture has contributed immensely to the understanding of spiritual thoughts and material world, combining religion and science.

Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values and social forms which are passed on from one generation to another in any given society. Swami Ranganathananda[11] dwells on material and mental culture. Drawing on the works of anthropologists, the Indian philosopher Ranganathananda[12] speaks of work culture. He argues that, "when a group achieves a measure of stability and security in the material base of its culture through settled agriculture and industry thus allowing for a certain amount of leisure, it tends to invest this surplus leisure in the higher plane of man's inner life, thus giving rise to the second aspect of its culture, namely mental culture."

During the Vedic period, the Indians were already exploring the life of mind, asking bold philosophical questions concerning nature of the universe, the meaning of human existence, and the difference between having and

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[11] Ranganathananda, S. *The Essence of Indian Culture*. New Delhi : India International Centre, 1963.
[12] *Ibid.*

being, being and becoming. The great minds of the Vedic period in Indian history not only laid the foundations of Indian society, but also created the fountainhead of knowledge.

Shah[13] sums up beautifully, drawing inspiration from the national song, *Vandemataram*, the significant role of the environment in the formulation and development of Indian culture" "Surrounded on the three sides by the girdle of *Ratnakar* (ocean) the repository of jewels, wearing the diadem of Himalaya, watered by the holy Ganges, Yamuna, Sindhu, Kaveri, Narmada, Krishna and Godavari (*sujalam*), laden with fruit gardens of Kashmir, Kulu and Kumaon (*suphalam*), the breeze flowing from the clove creepers and sandal forests gives it the vintage being called "*malayaj sheetalam*'; the green and fertile land of Ganga-Yamuna gives it the ascription of being evergreen (*sashya-shyamalam*)." Thus nature has bestowed on India all the gifts that it could possible bestow.

Sources of Indian Culture - a Historical Reconstruction

Chaman Nahal[14] observed that Indian culture is essentially hero worship or hero-centered. It has gathered its strength from the galaxy of role models like Buddha, Ashoka, Sherbore, Vikramaditya, Akbar, Rani Lakshmibai and several others from our freedom struggle movement. Our masses had very rightly given appropriate titles to them. Thus we had Mahatma, Panditji, Maulana, Netaji, Sardar, Gurudev and so on. Similarly,

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[13] Shah, G.R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.
[14] Chaman, N., The Spirit of India. *The Hindustan Times*, 12 January 1997.

the names of Great Vedic rishis like Viswamitra and Vasistha still reverberate in the Indian atmosphere.

Radhemohan[15] notes that India is the only country in the world which was invaded several times by people from different parts of the world, including the Dutch, the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Moghuls, the Persians, besides aggressions by two of its own neighbours, Indian culture has withstood the myriad invasions spanning over several centuries, which has made Indian culture a unique composite culture. India has always been and is even today a great confluence of racial intermixing, cross fertilization of religious ideas and secular thought, and co-existence of languages and dialects, indeed a veritable microcosm of the globe.

Indian culture needs to be considered in the prospective of its diversity in terms of languages, religions and regions. It is a combination of a variety of practices around various cultural forms. As sociologist Srinivas[16] has rightly stressed, the cultural situation in India changes every few miles. Even within a single village each caste has a culture which is somewhat different from others.

Historically culture and cultural diffusion has become the monopoly of the elite classes in the society and thus tended to have virtually automatic product which belongs to a social strata that is considered superior and one that has been able to seize a position of leadership. It is also synonymous

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[15] Radhemohan (Ed.). *Composite Culture and Indian Society : Problems and Prospects of Integration*. New Delhi : Dr. Zakir Husain Educational and Cultural Foundation, 1989.
[16] Srinivas, M.N., Indian Anthropologists and the Study of Indian Culture. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 March 1996.

with artistic achievements - be it temples or castles, literary or other artistic masterpieces. Without the support or patronage of elite groups cultural products lose their prominence and popularity with the passage of time. The continuity in high culture, popular music and folk dance so common to rural theaters like *yatra* and *nautanki* is gradually becoming a rarity. The centrality of this elitist culture in the conceptualisation of culture in India is well documented by Apte[17], Elder[18], and Mitra[19].

Paradoxically, however, what is 'looked upon' with awe in 'high' culture groups belonging to elite society is 'looked down upon' with disdain is non-elite groups belonging to the relatively low socio-economic strata of the society. For example, the pursuit of artistic achievements becomes a virtue among elite groups, while middle and how income groups tend to shun or discourage this.

Culture is built, shaped and moulded by individuals. For its proper growth and development it calls for sponsorship. In the past it was religion and royalty, later it was mainly governments and now in a global market economy is the transnational giants. The worship of beauty is taking new forms of fashion shows and Miss India, Mr. India, Miss world and Miss Universe contests. Whether it is sports like cricket and tennis or classical arts - particularly music and dance form as well painting require corporate sponsorship, sustenance and popularity. There are few takers for traditional

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[17] Apte, M.L. (Ed.)., *Mass Culture, Language and Arts in India.* Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1978.

[18] Elder, J.W., Mass Culture in Historical and Contemporary India in M.L. Apte (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*

[19] Mitra, A., *Television and Popular Culture in India: A Study in Mahabharat.* New Delhi : Sage, 1993.

rural sports like *Kabadi* or the ones like hockey for which Indian was one known for. Therefore, such sports find little encouragement compared to newer ones like cricket.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that in India, culture appears to have been defined, developed and directed according to the elite class(es) of the society. Even if the non-elites participated in the promotion and propagation is largely at the behest of the religious gurus in the vedic times, 'rishis' and 'rajas' later and politicians and bureaucrats in the present day. In recent years, however, culture and cultural forms are developed and dictated by global players in a world that is increasingly becoming borderless. Media moghals and barons create culture, mobilise the support for it through their patronage and benefit from it just the same way as any form of business. Over the years, cultural growth and transformation have occurred through diffusion, patronage, institutionalised promotion and entrepreneurship.

Religious Foundations

The three major religions in the world are : Christianity, Islam and Hinduism with an estimated following of 998 million, 589 million, and 478 million respectively. India has given birth to three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Hinduism is founded on the premise of *Sanatan Dharma* (Eternal law). It stress *Vasudaiva kutumbakam* (universal brotherhood) and it allows maximum freedom in matters of faith, worship and tolerance. As de Bary, et.

al.[20] point out, "Hinduism has always tended to assimilate rather than to exclude."

One widely shared view is that a common religion may not be possible in India, but a common basis for all religions and the growth of a liberal, tolerant spirit in religious matters is possible and existed for centuries in India. India is a country where pluralism has been given aesthetic sanction and legitimacy to religious judgements. The language of hymns and songs, of scriptures and spiritual teachings exhibit a mind-boggling variety.

The System of Four : A review of Indian literature and philosophy stresses the overarching nature of the system of four[21] (Chart 5.1), be it vedas, ages, *varnas, ashramas,* discipline policy, truths, *dharmas* or *dhams* (pilgrim centre).
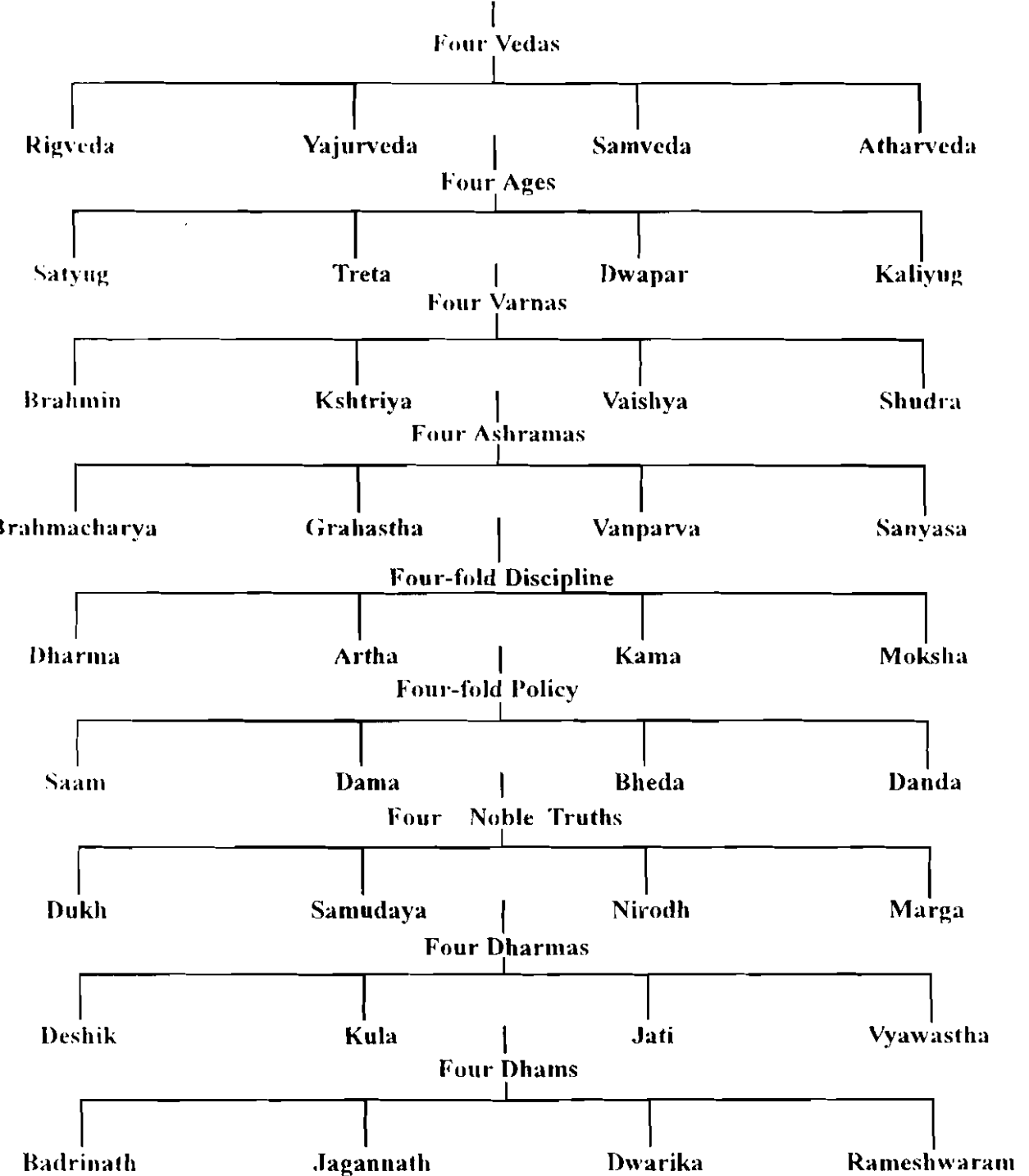
Dharma (righteousness), *artha* (Wealth), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (liberation) are the four *purusharthas* (goals of human life).

Vedas are regarded as the foundation of Indian culture. Rishis (Saints) are revered for their wisdom of the Vedas. They transmitted this perennial wisdom through their followers to guide the society in the right direction. As Sankaracharya asserts India is the accumulated treasure of spiritual truths discovered by the Rishis.

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[20] de Bary, T. *et. al.* (Eds.)., *Sources of Indian Tradition.* New Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.

[21] Shah, G.R., *Op. Cit.,* p.24

Chart 5.1 : System of Four

Four Vedas

| Rigveda | Yajurveda | Samveda | Atharveda |

Four Ages

| Satyug | Treta | Dwapar | Kaliyug |

Four Varnas

| Brahmin | Kshtriya | Vaishya | Shudra |

Four Ashramas

| Brahmacharya | Grahastha | Vanparva | Sanyasa |

Four-fold Discipline

| Dharma | Artha | Kama | Moksha |

Four-fold Policy

| Saam | Dama | Bheda | Danda |

Four Noble Truths

| Dukh | Samudaya | Nirodh | Marga |

Four Dharmas

| Deshik | Kula | Jati | Vyawastha |

Four Dhams

| Badrinath | Jagannath | Dwarika | Rameshwaram |

Source : Shah, G.R. *Glimpses of Indian Culture,* New Delhi : Trishul Publications, 1996

The concept of Dharma is one of the major contributions of the Vedas. *Dharma* means, in general, "that which is right." It refers first and foremost to a person's duties than his/her rights. "These duties devolve neither from divine decree nor from a person's own resolve, but from the position in life and society into which he is born. Thus a warrior must fight and a sweeper sweep, a farmer must plough and a women give birth, that is *dharma*. There is neither punishment nor reward in *dharma*, but the wisdom of this concept is that it helps people to accept their condition. A woman will never be a man, a man can never be a child again. Accordingly we have to act in harmony with out state, since rebellion against *dharma* is like wishing to delay a sunset. *Dharma* in this sense can be translated as 'law,' as in dharmashastra, a text book of law. The difference is that in Western countries law is made by people and abolished by people. *Dharma* cannot be changed. *Dharma* is also a God who appears where men are being tested for their righteousness, strength of character, sense of honour, generosity and readiness for self-sacrifice. Those are the qualities *Dharma* likes to see in men, their willingness to bow to the eternal laws of dharma. Knappert[22] observes that the epic saga of the Mahabharata is based entirely on the heroes' acceptance of *Dharma's* immutable rules of behaviours. It remained indefinable and is the highest form of law that is not legislated. As Joshi[23] argues, there are certain universal truths which once discovered become guidelines for action. The great *smritis* of Yajnavalkya and Manu tried to codify *Dharma*. As Lord Krishna says in his *Geetopadesham (or Bhagvad*

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[22] Knappert, J., *An Encyclopedia of Myth and Legend : Indian Mythology*. New Delhi : Harper Collins, 1992.

[23] Joshi, K., *The Veda and Indian Culture*. New Delhi : Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishtan, 1991.

Gita), action without desire is action with *Dharma*. In contrast, the western motivation theories stress that desire drives action.

In ancient India - Vedic India - the insistence on *Dharma* an the spiritual liberation were the highest motives of life. Human beings are by nature spiritual. Later on, however, there has been a gradual weakening of ideals of *Dharma*.

Waterstone[24] argues that in India science and religion are not opposed fundamentally, as they often seems to be in the West, they are seen as part of the same great search for truth and enlightenment that inspired the sages of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The dominant belief is that past deeds influence present live. In all India traditions, the world is a product of creative play of *maya* (illusion). The ascetics seek to attain "release" *(moksha or nirvana)* from the materials world and from the endless cycle of birth and death. Buddhism preached the eight-fold noble path to nirvana (bliss). These eight principles are: right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness and right concentration.

Radhakrishnan[25], the great Indian philosopher-President of the country once observed that, "The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the brave knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit, who has attained insight into the universal sources by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she clung fast to this ideal..."

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[24] Waterstone, *Op. Cit.*, 1995.
[25] Radhakrishnan, S., *An Idealist View of Life*. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1932.

Culture values and beliefs not being universal, it can be said that the imported western values and belief are at variance with our values and belief system. It is not that everything associated with western values, belief systems and cultural mores are detrimental or our traditional notions of good life or harmony with nature.

Due to successive foreign invasions, particularly since the beginning of the British rule dominated by the vested commercial interests of the East India Company, the spiritual values of *Dharma* have given way to a new *Dharma* based on materialism.

True Hinduism is accommodative. it is for this reason that Indians proudly carry a part of it wherever they go. As Swami Vivekananda[26] notes," I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and Universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance but we accept all religions as true". This accommodative nature of Hinduism makes it appear different from other religions. *Ekam sat vipra Bahuda Vadanti.* "That which exists is one : Sages call it by various names." This ideology is reflected in many of the Hindu mythologies.

Today the country is undergoing a cultural revolution. There is a growing section of the India society which is fast losing their faith in the traditional forms of religion and along in the traditional values in religion. At the same time no other religion or religious forms to suit modern

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[26] Vivekananda, *Opening Address at the Parliament of Religion* at Chicago. 11 September 1893.

requirements while retaining their mass appeal and specially the values they stand for. This is essentially true of Hinduism. While religion is flying out of the window of the educated modern Hindu, other cults and superstitions including belief in astrology, palmistry, and the like are taking their place. As Swami Ranganathananda[27] avers, the educated Hindu's loss of faith in his traditional religion is not even being compensated by the substitution of a robust atheism having its roots in humanitarianism and compassion.

Symbols, Rituals and Practices

Ritual are collective activities which may appear superfluous for outsiders. Within the culture, the insiders interpret them as highly essential.

Various cultural customs and practices of today have their origins from the Vedic times. The very word 'classical' in Indian music places the music in a time frame that dates back to the 1500 BC. Indian music and dance is based on *sastras* (science). Its principles are traditionally believed to be present in the verses and recitation of the *Samveda*. Music is once considered sacred. Each of the seven notes or 'raga' (melodic mood) is suffused with a specific mood *(bhava)* and flavour *(rasa)* and may only be sung at certain times of the year, or at specific moments during the day or night. Dance in India was once considered as a sacrifice of self before the principal deity of the temple. The dancer looses his/her self and finds it manifested in the eternal spirit. Indian dance is a unique combination of gesticulation *(bhava)* and timing *(tala)*. Aesthetic entertainment of the kind found in traditional India is different from the mere sensual. It pre-supposes a mental discipline, a

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[27] Ranganathananda, *The Essence of Indian Culture*. New Delhi : India International Centre, 1963.

discerning code in sensibility and wisdom. It does not necessarily oblige each and every individual in the society.

The folk dances, as Tiwari[28] observes, are generally spontaneous and are the creation of people's imagination and desire for artistic and emotional expression. Displaying no inclination towards a rigid form, the whole depiction of folk art is guided more by the subject of songs that either glory nature, express occupational traditions or offer devotion to the deities. Seasonal and religious, they have a sense of freedom with regional affinities and differences embodying warmth and charm and beauty that are refreshing by their very untutored quality. In folk dances of India, the creative urge of the people is reflected throughout the ages by way of actual performance and resemblances of song and motif. Though these dances, unsupported by the written word, and established by its tremendous sociological impact, customs and tradition have been established and people's aesthetics enriched.

Socio-Philosophical Roots of Indian Culture

The socio-philosophical foundations of Indian culture are rooted in several concepts which are briefly discussed hereunder :

1. **Truthfulness**. Hindu religions, Indian philosophers and statesmen have always held, *'Satyameva Jayate'* (Let the truth triumph). Gandhian philosophy is based on a quest for truth, belief in trusteeship and faith in non-violence. The practice of truth means integration of

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[28] Tiwari, U.N., *India- A Cultural Voyage: A Cultural Survey of the Land of Eternal Resurgence.* New Delhi : Select Book Service, 1983.

practice with precept and thoughts with deeds, letting no gap between what is said and what is dome.

2. **Tolerance** : Tolerance towards all religions and persons is a trait which Indian culture strongly stands for. Examples of religious tolerance dates back to the times of King Ashoka. Though Kind Ashoka himself was a staunch follower of Buddhism, he tolerated and respected all other religions. This religious tolerance often acts as a buffer in neutralising the communal disharmony that, occasionally erupts.

3. **Non-violence** : Indian culture emphasizes non-violence. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) is the fundamental ethical corpus of Indian culture. It derives its basic impetus from Jainism. Gandhi preached truth and non-violence.

4. **Strong Family Ties** : India has a long tradition of joint family system. As Sinha[29] avers, the bases of joint family are common values agreed and followed and often esteemed as ideal. Any accent on individual value leads to a strain and tends to break the joint structure. The joint family is family centered, characterised by intimacy, mutuality of interests, strong primary group controls, and mutual assistance in times of need. Family traditions and pride are strong in large joint families and individual members are dominated by the opinions of the larger group, mainly the elders. Over the years, the joint family system came

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[29] Sinha, R., *Social Change in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1961.

under severe stresses and strains due to internal and external factors. Quoting Ross, Sinha[30] argues, the crisis in joint family in recent decades could be traced largely to personal or individual will clashes and a tug of war between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The external factors are urbanisation and industrialisation, increased mobility of younger members of family in search of employment/career opportunities.

In a joint family, elders had a moderating effects in the upbringing of children in a family. If the parents are rough with the children the elders would soothe them. If the parents are excessively indulgent, the elders would exercise a sobering influence. Besides, they had the time, interest and inclination to pass on moral values and stores to make them worldly wise even as they stress on moral values and moral conduct. As families became nuclear and as both spouses began to seek employment/career, the children in many families are generally deprived of the attention, guidance and support of the elder members of the family. This was not a problem in a joint family because always there were grand parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. In a nuclear family etc. In a nuclear family the TV has, in may cases become the baby sitter.

5. **Self-respect and respect for others** : Bhagavadgita preaches that God is with us and within us. This awareness of God's nearness to human beings makes the people respect his/her self and the self in others. This awareness helps in the development of a positive attitude towards life

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[30] *Ibid.*

and its various activities and creations. This very same attitude results in the belief about *Vasudaiva eka kutumbakam* (the universe is one family). Being part of a larger family, each of us should have respect and concern for every other person.

Respect for elders is another special characteristic of the Indian culture.

6. **Education for life and life as education** : The relationship between education and life was realised in ancient India even though bulk of its population was illiterate. In today's "modern India," Indian culture new education as a preparation for life and considered life as a process of continuing education. The main objectives of the ancient system of education are succinctly summarised by Kireet Joshi[31] (p.27) in the following words :

> "Lead me from falsehood to truth.
>
> Lead me from darkness to light.
>
> Lead me from death to immortality."

Kireet Joshi[32] (pp.32-33) sums up that, "The ancient Indian education developed as part of the general system of Indian culture. This system at once indulged and controlled man's nature, it fitted him for his social role... there was a great deal of emphasis on discipline ... purity of body, purity of emotions and purity of thought .... (and)

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[31] Joshi, K., *Op. Cit.*
[32] *Ibid.*

Swadhyaya (self study) as the corner stone of the pupil's discipline and method of learning. The pupil was expected to develop extraordinary powers of memory, imagination and thought. The predominance of oral tradition necessitated the cultivation of the power of memory; the high content of philosophical and spiritual knowledge necessitated the cultivation of subtlety and complexity of thought; the natural setting of the Ashrams and Gurukulas in the open forest, where nature could be an intimate friend and companion, necessitated the cultivation of the power of inner communication, imagination and natural delight." The life of the pupil was vigorous and rigorous, even though the education system provided for not only discipline and self study, but also fun and frolic. This is best illustrated in Kalidas's portrayal of the Ashram of Kanva in his seminal work, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam.*

7. **Emphasis on moral conduct** : The socialisation process in many Indian families which is based on ancient Indian philosophical thought stressed the need to pursue absolute truth. Until recently, both at home and in the school, children, were fed with stories and instructions contained in various niti sastras. They always kept us aware of the correct behaviours in society of normal persons in various situations. The ideal conduct advocated in *sastras* is often utilitarian and hedonistic. It required not only a discipline of reasoning and scientific temper but also the criticality of conduct and control over passion and emotion. It meant carrying one's *dharma* without anticipation or anxiety, freeing oneself from all bondages and be able to enjoy the bliss that flows from it. Those who aspire to achieve *nirvana* (bliss) usually led a monastic life.

Quoting Principal Bashirunnisa Begum of Al-Fatah school, Nanda[33], observed that, "The present day education lays a great deal of emphasis on material gains. Mere material gains cannot be the objective for a human being. This materialistic approach to life has made man corrupt, fame-hungry and devoid of austerity, humanism and service motivation. To combat this tendency education in religious and moral values is a must. Teachers alone can not accomplish this great task; the active cooperation of the enlightened elders and leaders of the community, parents and guardians and the government is very necessary."

8. **The other face of Indian culture** : It is naive to consider any culture as fully perfect or eternally stable. Indian culture too has its dark spots. The caste system ordered a particular social order and social relations which limited education as per the needs of the social roles, perpetuated inequality and discrimination and endured, if not encouraged, suppression and oppression of the disadvantaged groups in the society. Sri Aurobindo[34] was concerned that, "If it (the Indian spirit) was obliged to stereotype caste as the symbol of its social order. It never quite forgot, as the caste spirit is apt to forget, the human soul and the human mind are beyond caste...."

9. **Caste, Marriage and Family and Prototypes of all Social Organisations** : No discussion on Indian culture in complete without

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[33] Nanda, R.T., *Human Values in Education.* New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1997.
[34] Sri Aurobindo. *Indian Unity : A Symposium.* New Delhi : Publications Division, 1891.

reference to 'caste" which is a complex phenomenon and a dynamic process that, in many ways, is peculiar. Caste system with its religious and social sanctions as followed in India for centuries is unique to India even though some elements of it may be found in some other parts of the world too.

Mazumdar[35] notes that caste at the time of 'Manu' was a fluid structure, with transition and mobility, vertical as well as horizontal, characterizing it in the context of *'anuloma'* and *'pratiloma'* marriages. This was the formulative period of caste structure. Caste in the medieval period became rigid and stereotyped. The rigidity encouraged fission but circumscribed fusion. The challenge of caste was met by religious revivalism in which sectarian and other types of castes emerged to accommodate deviants and aspirants after caste status. Today caste structure is fighting a war of survival and a mobilizing forces which were dominant or unintegrated. To the social functions of caste are being added politico-economic functions resulting in a caste awareness which may yield the 'forbidden fruit' to those caste groups which are kept out of the mainstream political and economic life.

The diverse explanations of the caste system point to its amazing complexity. Several factors contributed to the origin and the growth of caste system in India. The doctrine of Karma coupled with the belief in transmigration of souls gave it the religious sanction.

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[35] Mazumdar, D.N., *Op. Cit.*

As Stephen Fuchs[36] observes, in ancient India, caste system made itself into an organic while in which all occupations work for the same end as different limbs of the same body. It assigned, by birth, different functions to different castes. Some see the system advantageous in that it gave every person and social group equilibrium in social and civic life and psychological security and to a limited extent even economic security. Its negative effects are, however, devastating. The caste system lead to fatalism and impeded social progress for the sake of stability. It also led to contempt for the other castes, exploitation and oppression of the 'inferiors' and bred group egotism and communal tensions. It fostered a spirit of exclusiveness, jealousy, greed and fear which are inimical to the political unity and harmony of the country. Worse still was the practice of 'untouchability/ and the plight of the 'untouchables' whom Gandhi referred to as '*Harijan* (the 'children of God')'.

Over the years, the influence of various social reformers and the processes of social change like urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation have led to changed life style, eating habits, commuting in public transport systems, relaxations in caste-occupation nexus, and even inter-caste marriages. The old social barriers of caste divisions are breaking up. Caste discrimination and untouchability are prohibited by law, but not caste system as such. Folkways do not and have not changed with state ways (laws) alone.

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[36] Fuchs, S., *The Origin of Manu and His Culture*. Bombay : Asia Publishing House,1963.

The institution of marriage is quite diverse in India. We have all forms of marital life, including the polygamy of the matriarchal Nairs, the fraternal polyandry of the Cis-Himalayan tribes, the polygamy among the Mohamedans and backward castes of Hindus and other diverse methods of wife securing.

10. **Family** : In the Indian context a family is not only a reproductive unit and socialising agency but also one which provides each person with his main link with the wider society. Madan[37] observed that Kinship ties are generally taken to be the most durable, reliable, worthy, and moral of all social relationships. Kinship begins with the family and extends through the family. Moreover, as Eric Wolf[38] had observed, the family is the bearer of virtue and of public reputation. An individual's reputation is linked with that of his/her family and with her/her own relations.

Mayer[39] comments about the Indian family bring out the subtle distinctions about the Indian family which the media now seem to provoke people to question: "The dominant note in the formal pattern of relations in the household is that of restraints. This restraint between people of different ages and restrain between those of the opposite sex."

[37] Madan, T.N., *Family and Kinship : A Study of Pundits of Rural Kashmir*. New York : Asia Publishing House, 1965.
[38] Wolf, E.R., Kinship, Friendship and Patron Client Relations in Complex Societies. in M. Banton (Ed.). *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*. London : Tavistock Publications, 1966.
[39] Mayer, A.C., *Caste and Kinship in Central India - A Village and Its and Region*. Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1966.

Mayer adds that his characterisation may make the household appear to a person from a different tradition of family life as restrictions and autocratic authority. "Yet, in a happy household this is patently not the case. Authority on one hand, and respect on the other mix in an easy carrying out of duties, and the reticence of the women is one of modesty, not fear. "Restraint and hierarchy, it should be noted, are also characteristics of relations among people of different jatis as well as within family. Paternalism as an institution can be seen as an extension of the traditional joint family system, where the 'kartha' is the head of the household. The various other traits include : familiarity, a sense of security, respect for elders, unconditional and unquestionable obedience to authority, etc.

Mandebuam[40] quotes from Katheleen Gough's work on Indian family which brings yet another distinction concerning the Indian family. "I am only a young boy, Madam" one man of 35, a husband and father, replied to Katheleen Gough's question about his responsibilities. "My father is alive. What is my responsibility?"

5.5. INDIAN CULTURE ABROAD

The spiritual heritage of India has today become an essential part of western thinking. Shah[41] (p.155) quoted Soviet archaeologist Khmalinsky to observe that," The people of Soviet central Asia now remember the age old ties that bound them with the people of greater India, ties which live on in

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[40] Mandelbaum, D.G., *Society in India*. New Delhi : Popular Prakashan, 1972.
[41] Shah, G.R., *Op. Cit.*

numerous forms of people's architecture, music and everyday life. They remember that their ancient national culture not only drew upon the treasure house of Indian art, but in turn enriched it with the forms of their own monumental architecture, with the methods and techniques of miniature paintings and poetry."

The artistic display that adorn the caves of Bamyan and Habak, the ruins of Kutch, Kazil, Turfan and Khotan speak volumes of the magnitude of Indian Culture. It is the home of rishis who practised the techniques of release and ecstasy of bequeathed yoga *tantra* and legendary powers of the yogis to future centuries.

Due to Buddha, Indian culture spread through many parts of East and South East Asia. The religious awakening and cultural advancement that India offered to these countries focus on the unity of life, belief in toleration, cooperation and peace. The spread of yoga, metaphysics and music is making great headway in the West.

5.6. CULTURAL CHANGES IN INDIA: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

Indian culture emphasised a great deal on sharing and tolerance. The institutions of marriage and family strengthened this notion. Joint Hindu Family system nurtured and nourished these values. With industrialisation and modernisation, as families become nuclear and smaller, and when both spouses work and reel under pressures of work and family, tolerance peters our, family breaks down and divorce rate increases.

The challenges of modernity of traditional culture are multidimensional. As Pande[42] notes "If science and humanism determine the basic values of modernity. Religion has generally stood for divinely revealed tradition. For the modern mind culture is a purely human enterprise which moves into the future in a tentative, experimental manner. For religion, however, human beings must seek to follow what God has revealed in the past. The two notions thus appear contradictory. Some attribute this contradiction to western influence. However, an equally impressive number of scholars feel that this modernity is nothing but a restoration *(uddhara)* of tradition to its original purity. They have not found any essential contradiction between religion and science or religious law and social reform. Nor have they seen any reason for social conflict in the diversity of religion."

Eminent sociologist Yogendra Singh[43] asserts that the cultural changes in India mirror both forces of resilience and transformation and that modernisation has contributed not only to India's development, but also to its underdevelopment. He observes that the quest for economic and social modernisation has activated cultural forces which legitimize values like acquisitiveness, opportunistic utilitarianism, revivalism, communalism and primordialism. Pande[44], however, argues that even if the evolution of modern materialist culture is parallel with the decline of the influence of religion, the underlying moral values did not disappear altogether. Certain values like love, pity, and truth are as much modern as ancient.

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[42] Pande, G.C., Two Dimensions of Religion - Reflections based on Indian Spiritual Experience and Philosophical Traditions. in Deutsch, E. (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, 1994.
[43] Singh, Y., *Social Change in India: Crisis and Resilience.* New Delhi : Har Anand Publications, 1996.
[44] Pande, G.C., *Op. Cit.*

Several of the traits that characterise Indian society show uniformity at a certain level of aggregation and beyond that point one sees ambivalence which is at once dichotomous and divergent. The caste system became divisive and prejudice and discrimination led to exploitation of certain groups of others. Sanatan Dharma symbolized *Adharma* for some and the principle of universal brotherhood was in peril. Women, who played a significant role as saints and goddesses were confined to the house and subjected to male subordination. Eventually, however, social reformers from different parts of the country ushered in a series of changes to end discrimination and let justice, liberty and equality were enshrined as the guiding spirit of Independent India in its Constitution. The social reconstruction that is taking place in India symbolises the social dynamism, mobility and growth on the one hand and the growing anomie and alienation.

The Challenge of Social Change in India :

Society in India is undergoing transformation due to the cumulative impact of social and economic distortions caused by misinterpretation of religious beliefs, colonialism, freedom movement and the crystallization of a new normative framework in the form of the constitution and the economic planning process that followed. The parliamentary democracy emphasised, in the preamble to the constitution of India, the principles of :

Justice, social, economic and political

Liberty of thought, expression, belief of faith and worship

Equality of status and opportunity

Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual

and the unity of the nation.

The economic planning emphasised the formation of socialist society through the operation of a mixed economy where the State and the private sector have their roles in economic development.

Any discussion on Indian culture must necessarily take into account the ideal enshrined in the Preamble to its Constitution and the goals of economic planning. Even in the post liberalization era, the phrase, "socialist society" continue to be embedded in the Constitution. Social progress is sought to be achieved through economic growth combining the principles of equity and efficiency. Yogendra Singh[45] (p.150) avers that these social elements are defined in secular-rational terms.

In the past the caste and class were treated as same (though some disagree on this point) and accepted uncritically. Yogendra Singh[46] (P.230) point out, the purpose of social stratification in the past was based on notions of social order. Caste and class promote notions of a static, a-historical perspective that was bred on the assumption that social entities exist as being and not as becoming. Today the focus is on social dialectics than social order. Both caste and class are seen as aberrations that cause contradictions inflicting conflict that is becoming endemic. The preoccupation is achieve status that higher castes once monopolised for themselves than strive for success through positive work values.

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[45] Singh, Y., *Op. Cit.*
[46] *Ibid.*

5.7. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is apt to quote the Czarina of Indian culture Pupul Jayakar, who rightly said :

To delve into India's past, to discover the various elements that have come together to create the ground, the matrix of this country, is to undertake a voyage of discovery which has no limits. However deep one travels, the past for ever recedes. India is in a state of flux. The challenges are at all levels of life. Rituals, art and function have generated enormous pressures and brought into the life of this country new tensions and demands. Myths, symbols that have taken centuries to evolve are under question. A technological culture generating its own values, is threatening to destroy an ancient tradition.