

INDIAN CULTURE

-Swami Shuddhabodhananda Saraswati

Reclaim the Cultural Glory

Mother India won its freedom from the foreign rule through the sacrifices of valiant sons and daughters, but it is yet to reclaim her cultural legacy of unity, morality and spirituality. Even after almost seven decades of freedom from political slavery, majority of us, especially the educated elites, have not overcome their mental slavery to the West. Whatever the West thinks or does is the best for them. They have no time or inclination even to discover the sublime nature of our culture and its age-old efficacy to make their lives worthwhile and sublime. By forgetting or disowning their glorious heritage, the Indians are behaving like the elephants who are mighty but behave meekly in front of weakling – the māhut. Or they are like Hanuman who knows not his strength unless reminded on account of a curse.

Sanātana Dharma is the Remedy for The Present Malady

Bhāratīyas (Indians) blinded by the glamour of science and technology have forgotten Dharma and their culture. Dharma is the prescribed course of conduct as enjoined by the Vedas. Dharma protects, sustains and knits together the humanity as an integrated whole. Human degrades to the level of brute if dharma is not adhered to. Dharma is not necessarily a religion, though religion is a small facet of dharma. Dharma is the basis of all the religions. Today the dharma is cast aside and adharma is rampant. As a result, there is restlessness, confusion, chaos everywhere. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has diagnosed precisely this malady. He says that **there are certain evils parading not only in India but all over the world. They are: Business without morality; politics without principle; devotion without discipline; earning money without hard work; education without character; religion without love; worship without sacrifice; and science without humanity. A life of Sanātana Dharma alone is the antidote for this malady.** Therefore, at least we, the Bhāratīyas should get ourselves convinced about practising Sanatana dharma and make our lives worthy.

The Vedas are Universal

Sanātana Dharma enshrined in the Veda is the back-bone of our Bharatiya (Indian) culture. The Vedas are universal in nature. Whether the followers of other religions accept it or not, the Vedas form the basis of all religions just as the mother earth is to all the palaces, mansions, buildings, houses and huts.

Indian Culture Revives and Restores its Dynamism

This ancient culture of Bhārat (India) has gone through so many ups and downs from time to time. Yet not only it revives but also continues to be dynamic whereas the other civilizations have come and gone like soap bubbles. Prof. Brajendranath Seal, a college-mate of Swami Vivekananda, and then the Vice Chancellor of Mysore University, had said in a **paradoxical statement: 'India is ever aging but never old'. Many Avatārs and saints have revived the Sanātana Dharma restoring its pristine glory.**

Western Thinkers on Indian Culture

The Western philosophers too have not missed the greatness of our culture and the Upanishads contained in the Vedas. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, who was certainly not a man given to deal in extravagant praise of any philosophy but on his own observed: 'In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death'.

Max Muller, the great philosopher said : 'If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions to some of them which well deserved the attention of even those who studied Plato and Kant, I should point out to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks, Romans and Semitic race, may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensible, more universal, in fact more human life, I should again point out to India'.

Maria Wirth, a freelance writer who has lived in India for the past 33 years observes: 'Though I have lived in India for a long time, there are still issues here that I find hard to understand. For example, why do so many educated Indians become agitated when India is referred to as a Hindu country? The majority of Indians are Hindus (followers of Sanātana Dharma). India is special because of its ancient Hindu tradition. Westerners are drawn to India because of Hinduism. Why then is there this resistance by many Indians to acknowledge the Hindu roots of their country?'

..... In my early days in India I thought every Indian knew and valued his tradition. Slowly I realized I was wrong. The British colonial masters had been successful in not only weaning away many of elite from their ancient tradition but even making them despise it. It helped that the British-educated class could no longer read the original Sanskrit texts and believed what the British told them. This lack of knowledge and the brainwashing by the British education may be the reason why many so-called "modern" Indians are against anything Hindu. They don't realize the difference between Western religions that have to be believed (or at least professed) blindly, and which discourage, if not forbid, their adherents to think on their own. And the multi-layered Hindu Dharma which gives freedom and encourages using one's intelligence..... The Dalai Lama said some time ago that, as a youth in Lhasa, he had been deeply impressed by the richness of Indian thought. "India has great potential to help the world," he added'.

Swami Vivekananda on Preservation of Cultural Integrity

We must grow according to our nature. Vain is it to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have engrafted upon us; it is impossible,With other sciences, other institutions, and other traditions behind them, they have got their present system. We, with our traditions, with thousands of years of Karma behind us, naturally can only follow our own bent, run in our own grooves; and that we shall have to do.

We cannot become Western; therefore imitating the Westerns is useless.... A stream is taking its rise, away beyond where time began, flowing through millions of ages of human history; do you mean to get hold of that stream and push it back to its source to a Himalayan glacier? Even if that were practicable, it would not be possible for you to be Europeanised. If you find it is impossible for the European to throw off the few centuries of [old] culture which there is in the West, do you think it is possible for you to throw off the culture of shining scores of centuries? It can not be. To Europeanise India is therefore an impossible and foolish task.

There are two great obstacles on our path in India, the Scylla of old orthodoxy and the Charybdis¹ of modern European civilization. Of these two, I vote for the old orthodoxy, and not for the Europeanised system; for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, he may be crude, but he is a man, he has a faith, he has strength, he stands on his own feet;

while the Europeanised man has no backbone, he is a mass of heterogeneous ideas picked up at random from every source-and these ideas are unassimilated, undigested, unharmonised. He does not stand on his own feet, and his head is turning round and round. Why are some of our customs called evils? Because the Europeans say so. That is about the reason he gives. I would not submit to that. Stand and die in your own strength; if there is any sin in the world, it is weakness; avoid all weakness, for weakness is sin, weakness is death. These unbalanced creatures are not yet formed into distinct personalities; what are we to call them men, women, or animals? While those old orthodox people were staunch and were men.’²

Four Tier Goal of Life

Sanātana Dharma recommends four tier goal of life called Chaturvidha Purushārtha. It begins with the pursuit of artha and kāma guided by dharma, and ending with the accomplishment of Moksha. Artha is earning money and securities required for a decent and dignified living. Kāma refers to the fulfillment of indispensable legitimate desires. Moksha is a state of total freedom from sorrow by directly discovering that one’s true nature called ātmā or Brahman itself is limitless, independent happiness.

The Ultimate Divinity Principle

The sentiency principle, the pure awareness or consciousness in all the living beings and the basis of the entire Creation is ātmā or Brahman. Brahman is revealed as that principle which cannot be perceived or objectified by the eyes, ears, mind, tongue, sense of smell, sense of touch and vital airs (prānās), but because of which all these are able to function (Kenopanishad). It is the universal truth irrespective of religion, cast, creed, gender and nationality. It is the ultimate Divinity principle. It is the God principle. This universal truth is thoroughly established and revealed in our scriptures such as Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, Brahmasutra, Puranas, Itihasas like Ramayana and Mahabharat.

Some other religious masters also speak about this truth. For example, on one occasion, when the religious authorities accused Jesus of making himself equal to God, he said to them ‘....I have said you are God’ (John 10:34). Mansur the Islamic saint called ‘Saint of Baghdad’ had discovered this truth that entire cosmos including himself is one Divinity principle. He declared ‘Anal Hauq’. ‘Anal Hauq’ means ‘I am God’. It corresponds to soham, shivoham or Aham Brahma Asmi of the Upanishads. The ignorant Maulvis and the King considered Mansur to be an infidel. They tortured and beheaded Mansur. But he was uttering ‘Anal Hauq’ upto the last breath with a smile on his face.

Conclusion

Our ancestors lived upto the values and Truth contained in the Vedas. That is why Bharat was a Karma Bhumi with plenty and prosperity, a Tyāga Bhumi having many who even sacrificed their lives for a good cause and Yoga Bhumi abounding in Avatāras and Saints. Let us inherit this sublime culture and prove ourselves to be the worthy children of Mother India.

¹ Two dangers such that avoidance of one increases the risk from the other. (The names of a sea-monster and whirlpool in Greek mythology). Actually, a dangerous rock on the Italian coast opposite the whirlpool Charybdis on the coast of Sicily.

² With acknowledgement to ‘Prabuddha Bharata’ May, 2012. From the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 3.151, 153, 172, 198, 219.