

Indian Culture - A Noble Ideal of Universal Love

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Abstract: *The objective of this extract is to go through of the some of the reflections on our great Indian culture. We often hear the phrase "Indian Culture". But when we speak of that, certainly we do not have in mind the details of our culture. We have a vision, a view point which is unique to Indian culture. It is a culture which rejects narrow mindedness. Indian culture means sympathy and compassion. It adores the heart as well as the intellect. Mother earth is the one who forgives all our wrongs to her. She is very generous. Indian culture tell us that the earth is like our mother and should not be neglected at any cost..*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the sum total of man's thoughts, expressions and actions. Hindu culture is understood from the Vedas, Ithihasas, Puranas etc. Consideration for the feelings of others, for the rights of others and for the faults of others are the highest marks of culture and without this man would be uncultured. Indian culture has tried to build an intimate ties with animals, birds, trees and shrubs. Indian culture has given to all these a loved place in the human family. Man's power is limited. But Indian culture teaches man to use that limited power in the best possible way. It is not in our power to care for all the animals in nature. We cannot have a loving relationship with every single animal in nature. But let us at least create bonds of affection with some of the animals.

In man's moral philosophy, the whole of creation should be considered, whether animate or inanimate. If man cares only for the human species, he would be on the same level of animal's and birds. Man will prove supreme in creation only if he loves and looks after non-human creation, only if he establishes a close relationship with non-human nature. The real greatness of man lies in his being able to say that he loves everything in nature, rather than in his ability to destroy the rest of creation. The cow, in our traditional culture, is not merely regarded as an object of utility. It is true that in the beginning man saw the cow's importance mainly because of the numerous ways in which she can be useful.

But once a cow enters our courtyard she becomes a member of our family. Indian culture does not recommend that cows and bullocks, when they became old, should be sent off the butcher. The cow gave us an abundant supply of milk for ten or fifteen years. She produced oxen who plough our fields and do their jobs for us. If we abandon such a cow because she has now grow old, would be sheer ingratitude. Man does not live by utility alone. He has noble feelings which give value to his life. If we kill our loftier feelings with the weapon of utilitarianism, our worth as human beings will be reduced to zero that is what is our tradition teaches us and we must always remember this.

In the cultural tradition of India, the cow is to be regarded as a member of the family. We set aside a portion of food for the cow before beginning our meal. Serve the cow first and then eat : such is the practice. Through cow we worship all the other animals. Homage to cow is considered as homage to the entire animal kingdom. The cow is omnipresent in Indian culture. But now we know that the modern man due to their slavery, ignorance or poverty treats them in a brutal way and our life had become mechanical. Just as we can establish a relationship with the entire animal kingdom through the cow, we have to come close to birds too. With our limited strength we may not be able to relate to all birds of the entire world.

But we do remember the few species of birds that dwell near our houses. Before starting our meals we used to welcome crows and gives them a few crumbs of food in the past. Crows and sparrows are part of our surroundings and we remember them often. As an example we may notice how the grandmothers used to feed their younger one's calling the birds and giving them too a share of the food. The crows and sparrows in whose company our children grow up surely deserve our gratitude. By beckoning them we can express our interest in the entire kingdom of birds. Much value is given to birds in Indian culture. Peacock, kokil, parrot etc were our favorite birds and we used to give their names to our children. The relationship such birds and their masters is an example of the deep longing of the human soul to establish close kinship

with the rest of creation. Trees, shrubs, creepers, grass and reeds -- like animals and birds - are brought into intimate relationship with man. Such has been the Indian cultural tradition. It is obvious that man cannot look after the whole of the vast vegetative world. That is the function of the clouds in the sky.

But we do make an arbour for the tulsi plants. We look upon tulsi plant as a representative of the vegetation. we worship tulsi plant, we water it before other plants in the garden. To remember tulsi is to remember all other shrubs and plants. In our culture we see a deep love for bushes, climbers and creepers. If we look at the poetical dramas of Kalidas, we can see this love expressed in many ways. Shakuntala arranges the marriage of a mango tree with atimukta creeper. In our great epic Ramayana, Rama was banished into the forest for twelve years. But to him, life in the forest was not as an ordeal. Ram preferred the creepers and arbours of the forest to his marble palace in Ayodhya. He loved forests and groves. The moment we think of Rama, the image of Panchavati comes before us. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana spent many happy days in the shade of giant banyan trees in the Panchavati ashram. Sita planted trees around the little thatched hut where they lived. She fetched water from Godavari river to water them. We have ascribed human feelings and sensations to trees and shrubs. In the summer, a sun-shade is built over the tulsi plant to protect it from the heat. We abstain from plucking flowers and fruits in the evening, after dark. It is also customary not to dig grass after dark. The feeling is that trees and shrubs are asleep at night so we should not disturb them in their sleep.

In this way, Indian culture has created for man an affectionate relationship with animals and birds, trees, shrubs and creepers. It is assumed that animals, birds and trees are not only alive but are also endowed with consciousness and feelings. They are born, and they die. They experience both pleasure and pain. Such is the Indian way of looking at life in general. When we see a river, greet her. We are indebted to rivers in many ways so worship them. Worship mountain because it is covered with vegetation which sustains us, that is what our tradition says. We address rivers as mothers. Their life-giving water sustains us. We may be able to do without mother's milk, but not without the water offered to us by Mother River.

The entire creation teaches us Advaita. The clouds give away all their water, the trees give their fruits, the rivers their moisture, the flowers their fragrance the sun and the moon give their light. Their message is: whatever exists is for everyone, let every thing be enjoyed together. The stars in the firmament are for everyone. The life-giving breeze that God gives us are for one and all. But man builds walls of separation and marks out his own property. And the earth, the greatest of all. Mother Earth is the one who forgives all our wrongs to her. She is very generous. we prick her with our ploughshares and she comes with corn for us. We throw rubbish upon her we jump and dance upon her body. But Mother Earth does not get angry. She forgives all her children, Indian culture tells us that the earth is like our mother and should never be neglected. In our mythology, the earth is visualized as wearing the dress of ocean. The sun, the Moon and the stars are the flowers with which she adorns her hair. She has a garland of flowers with which she adorns her neck. The mythical serpents, Sheshanaga and Vasuki, are considered as her anklets on her feet. Getting up in the morning, we apologize to Earth for the disrespect we would be showing her throughout the day and for trod on her. With boundless love for the whole of creation, animate and inanimate expressing gratitude towards all, we begin our day. Such is our Indian Culture. Let us attune ourselves to its music. Let us try to understand the ideal of this culture, its goal, its intention and its longing. We may carry forward into the future the great vision of our ancestors who created this culture.

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