



Renaissance in India and the nature of Indian Culture as explicated by Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

The word ‘culture’ is the hallmark of India. India produced a unique type of highly advanced and variegated culture long ago. In spite of the regional, social and linguistic diversities of the country there is always a basic unity in Indian culture. The whole aim of a great culture is to lift man. Sri Aurobindo examines the nature of Indian civilization and culture, its religion and spirituality, its art, literature and politics. Spirituality is the master key of the Indian mind. India faced different crises but she never lost the insight. The renaissance lies both historically and logically in three steps. The first step was the reception of the European contact, the second was a reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence and the third step was a process of new creation. Spirituality is the other side of the coin of Indian culture and India is destined to maintain and preserve spirituality.

Key words: Divinity, Indian Culture, Politics, Renaissance, and Spirituality.

“India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples” – Sri Aurobindo

Introduction

The word ‘culture’ is the hallmark of India. India produced a unique type of highly advanced and variegated culture long ago. In spite of the regional, social and linguistic diversities of the country there is always a basic unity in Indian culture. Moreover, this culture has been maintained in spite of invasions from outside and subjugation by the British. This unbroken continuity of Indian culture survives still it has the root of the deep spiritual foundations.



Aim of a Culture

The essential intention of Indian Culture was extraordinarily high, ambitious and noble. It held that man can become not only conscious of the eternal and the infinite but to live in its power and universalize, spiritualise and divinize himself by Self-knowledge. The whole aim of a great culture is to lift man. Man actually lives in unfathomable ignorance. He is full of evil and discord and his actual life is a repulsive muddle of ugliness and jarring barbarisms. At present he is egoistic, material, unspiritual and engrossed by the needs and desires of his physical being. So, the culture teaches him. It gives him knowledge. It teaches reason, the law of good and unity, high law of his spirit. If a civilization has not any of these aims it is not a great culture. As ancient India has all these aims it is highest of all be and it surpasses all the others.

Indian Culture and its Renaissance

Sri Aurobindo was interested in revolutionary movements and liberation of his motherland. He began to build up his own theory of the special role of beauty. To Aurobindo beauty is strictly divine origin. This was his basic formula Sat-Chit-Ananda. Aurobindo could not imagine Religion without beauty.

In his book *The Renaissance in India and other essays on Indian culture* Sri Aurobindo examines the nature of Indian civilization and culture, its religion and spirituality, its art, literature and politics. The importance of Renaissance is insisted by explaining that the Renaissance, the new birth is the most important thing both to India and the world. It means the recovery or the change of India's old spirit and national ideals. The three facts are taken into consideration. They are the great past of Indian culture, the first period of the Western contact and the ascending movement. Aurobindo feels proud to insist that Indian Spirituality has always been maintained even in the decline of the national vitality. India faced many critical moment of her destiny. It is Spirituality that saved India always. Here Aurobindo strongly asserts that the spirituality has been the starting point of India's renaissance. Also, he is sure that any other nation would not have survived under the pressure without this spirituality. It is sure that India will keep her essential spirit and characteristic soul. The Indian renascence does not contradict the truths of



life which expressed by the old. These forms of renaissance are the truth restated which are cured of defect.

The renaissance lies both historically and logically in three steps. The first step was the reception of the European contact, the second was a reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence and the third step was a process of new creation. In the first step there was a revolutionary denial of the principles of the old culture. In the second step there occurred a total denial and at last in the third step the spiritual power of the Indian mind remained supreme and accepted the founded truth, useful modern idea. Here, Aurobindo compares the transformation of Japan and India. A swift transformation modernized Japan. Japan lives centrally at her temperament and in her aesthetic sense. Her strong temperament has been enough to preserve her national stamp and keep her soul alive. The other hand India lives centrally in the spirit but with less light and life. Though she is slow in adaptiveness of creation, her spirit is greater intense and more deeper.

Spirituality in India

Spirituality is the master key of the Indian mind. India faced different crises but she never lost the insight. She knew the importance of the physical sciences and also knew how to organize, the arts of the ordinary life. She never failed to realize that the physical science does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra – physical.

The first age of India's greatness was a spiritual age. In that age she lived passionately for the truth of existence through the intuitive mind and through an inner experience and interpretation both of the psychic and the physical existence. She was always enriched with fresh spiritual experience and discovery at each step of the national life. The noteworthy thing is that even in the hour of decline she never lost her spirituality. The second epoch of India's greatness was an age of intellect, the ethical sense. After the age of the spirit the age of the Dharma, after the Veda and Upanishads the later developments were being determined in the seed. The great classical age of Sanskrit culture was the flowering of intellectuality into refinements of science, art, literature, politics, sociology and mundane life.

Aurobindo was certain that the spiritual motive would be there in the future of India. He does not mean spirituality only as metaphysical mind. He is sure that metaphysical thinking is a strong element and



India will never lose her great powers. Even Buddhism gave the new set of values about life by its ethical system and spiritual method. Moreover, all great movements of life in India have begun with a new spiritual thought. The Brahma Samaj's cosmopolitan idea is worth to be described here. It combined a Vedantic inspiration and English Unitarianism. The Arya Samaj in the Punjab interpreted the truth of the Veda. It associated with Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Aurobindo praises India's old religious sects and disciplines which were revitalized. Even he points, out the original Islamic ideals and awakening life of mass in India. He proudly declares that India is the meeting – place of the religions. Here lies the key of the India renaissance in which the spirituality is returned.

External influences and Great Intellectuals

Aurobindo describes the external influences in Indian culture. He feels that Indian civilisation needs a lot of changes. There must be a powerful new creation in all fields. India confronted the huge rush of modern life and thought. She was invaded by dominant civilization. She can survive only with the fresh divine creations of her own spiritual ideals against the new and aggressive world. Indians can have new creation without a motionless sticking to old forms. It is the only way to their life and salvation. They need not accept Western culture and find their need. It is to be agreed that Indians imitated European Civilization making themselves a sort of brown English men and threw their ancient culture into the dust-bin. They put on livery of the West. When a culture has fallen into a state of comparative inactivity and when it receives the direct shock of a waking then there occurs the development of new ideas and formations. In literature the forms of novel, the short-story, the critical essay, in Science, the new discoveries and inventions, researches, in politics the press, the platform are the changes. There can be changes but when the people do with them for their own spirit is important.

It is proud to think about the earliest generation of intellectuals. Though they were few in number they were powerful by their talent which was the result of western education in India. They sought for a bare, simplified and rationalized religion and created a literature with European form which revolutionized Indian society. There were the impacts in the earliest period's reception of European form which was unavoidable. At first it took back the Indian mind to its thirst for knowledge. Then it threw the disordered modern ideas into the old culture. Finally, it gave new turn helped Indians to recover their ancient spirit and sense. We must acknowledge the works of the great legends Bankim Chandra Chatterji

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and Rabindranath Tagore who had illustrated the stages of India's transition. Swami Vivekananda must be praised for preserving and reconstructing India's value throughout his life time. But Indians' unsteady mind who were wearing half-Indian dress and half-European dress upon their bodies is to be worried. So, India must get back to the native power of her spirit.

Conclusion

Normal society looks upon man as a physical, vital and mental being that it is as mind-life-body. It is well known that man accepted himself as a rational animal. The spiritual aim and life and the spiritual view are different from those of both religion and of normal society. The spiritual view looks upon mind, life and body as means not as ends. Its philosophy is not puritanic but inclusive, not ascetic but integral. Man is not an odd mixture of mind, life and body but a soul incarnated upon earth for a divine fulfilment.

A spiritual society will be formed with the individuals' composition in the spirit not in the ego. It is not in the collective ego but in the collective soul. The Age of Religion has passed and the future of religion lies in spirituality. The spiritualization of the race as Aurobindo called it the Life Divine is man's date with destiny. Ancestors of India never lost their originality because they always thought about the worthy of Indian thoughts. Again, Aurobindo insists that taking over good and bad is the pell-mell. Indian culture is spiritual for all eternity. Spirituality is the other side of the coin of Indian culture and India is destined to maintain and preserve spirituality. So, taking India again to the proudest position and to retain its greatness lies only in the minds of present Indians.

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