

## CULTURAL FELLOWSHIP

### Through spiritual understanding

Culture is a term difficult to define but a definition may be hazarded : it is the quality of the personality of an individual, or people, who; have become truly human (individuals) endowed with the qualities of self-restraint and freedom, grace and humility, truthfulness and compassion. It is not a matter of cult which is but a habit of ritual. Nor is it a matter of opinion. It is the total pattern of the personality which reveals a quality of refinement, cultivated by arduous patience.

If such be the nature of culture, we have to ask ourselves whether there can be cultures understood, as they are being understood in modern times, in their unique diversities. Or should we seek the archetypal peoples or individuals are more or less imperfect manifestations ? The answer to this question would decide whether we conceive of culture as a creative process or rather or rather a building up of the structure of personality with a dynamic vision, or else as a return to the archetype through an abstraction of thought and induction from the particular cultures. The former would pass for a creative adventure whereas the latter would be a regression, a *nivritti*.

We are living in an age that believes in the reality of progress and evolution. Consequently we are living in an age that is inclined to be enthusiastic over the problem of discovery. Urged by the creative purpose, we are working towards the world-unity of peoples in all directions, economical, social, spiritual, and political. We believe that man can, or rather his reasoning can, shape the future, and be the architect of his own destiny. Unity is a means towards his destiny, rather than an end towards which he must unhesitatingly move.

The struggle for unity is closely linked up with the equally important struggle for securing the fullest expression of the individual personality. Our unity will be worth nothing if it is not an expression of our free decision and be the ground for greater freedom. Man feels himself consciously to be an incarnate godhead, and the importance which he grants to himself in the universe is, despite its questionability, the driving

power of his scientific mind and adventure. God and Nature have up to this point in evolution or history come up with their diversity. Man is charged with the task of willing unity, the unity of God and Nature in himself, as much as the task of willing the unity of all such diverse personalities in the Divine or Civitas Dei, the Perfect State. This would be a unity which is a product, of culture, a discovery or rather creation of man's mind, taken in its fullest plenitude of reason and intuition and volition.

Man has, I said, been charged with the task. Different geographical localities have evolved different way of carrying out this task. The Ancient Veda counselled the mantra of Fellowship for all [*Saha navavatu, saha nan bhunaktu, saha viryam karavavahai, Tejasvi navadhitam astu...*] "Let us be protected. May Brahman protect us both," May (He) enjoy us both, May we work together; May the Self-luminous Brahman be studied by us." It was the call the abiding or enduring comradeship in the pursuit of knowledge, that is the saving and redeeming and transforming *Brahma-jnana*. The Veda also fully understood that this knowledge is not to be had by those who have not practiced the virtues of courage, truthfulness, chastity, faith, and non-possession.

All other knowledge is Ignorance. The importance and categorical nature of this *Brahman-jnana*, (the possession of which alone entitles a man being called a *bahamana*), can never be fully appreciated until one is confronted with the challenge of the temporal process. Without being roused to the depths of the problem of the personality, without being presented with the 'dread' (*bhiti*) of the loss of the same, without having been troubled by the racking experience of the voice of conscience or daemon, there scarcely has appeared any need for the spiritual approach. The problem of spirituality, like any other human problem, is altogether personal in its emergence, not to speak of being inexpressibly private. The individual is met by defeat, disgrace, demotion, disease and privation, all material failures on the level of human life. No wonder it has been recognized that our spiritual struggles has had its starting point in this deep realization of the unworthiness of the world, its sense of unreality, and incomprehensibility with the means and instruments granted so far by Nature and its evolution. The sense of despair is the condition of the discovery of better means of

meeting the challenge by the invention of instruments to overcome the frustration of human perfection.

In India as historians have discovered, the earliest preoccupation of man was this sense of urgency to achieve transcendence over Nature and its limitations, through knowledge, through devotion to the values of real subjective existence, and through the metaphysical realisation of the spirit that is One, which confers unity on all the diverse manifestations and enriches the individual and the community through such knowledge. There is no doubt in this great task the Divine has through history. Manifold have been the experiences that she has passed through. Her history is a series of episodes which have been shaping her inner self the grand event of final unity.

Indian recognized the fundamental principle of universality based on spiritual life as the only principle that can make for integration of all people and cultures. From India went forth the message of the Spiritual Oneness of all, the recognition of which alone can confer righteousness and real security for each individual in the Universe. Prof. Rene Guenin in his efficient work on the *Introduction to Hindu Doctrines* has shewn how the Greek Philosophers were indebted to the Indian Philosophers or Seers (Rishis) for their fundamental ideas. The pattern of thought was of a deeper level in ideas. The pattern of thought was of a metaphysical. But in its movement towards the lower level of thinking it did undergo modifications and lost the metaphysical character, having become physical theories. The conflict between physics and metaphysics is but the conflict between real monism that endures the multiplicity and a false monism that rejects the multiplicity, for between the monism of the Spirit and the pluralism of individuals there can be accommodation and integration. The forces of Western Civilizations emphasized pluralistic and socialistic individualism : the religions that arose in the West have this specific character of being physical and social in the spirituality that they have brought. This gives its spirituality the materialistic character, and humanistic bias. The redemption of the individual is linked up closely with that of the world. Proselytization is a great contribution to the dynamics of religion and its progress. The truly cultural process is not merely a sharing-enterprise but a heroic enterprise, that is a moving towards the realisation of the salvation-fact, namely Spirit or God or Self. The

spiritual truth or categorical faith in the oneness of God in the many forms and manifestations of His glory and nature and all creatures, found in the philosophical intellect of Greece absorbed in the political and social life of man, an expression that made for the inductive understanding of the same principle of Oneness now conceived as Unity. But Indian Spirituality has striven to hold on to concept of Oneness of the Divine which can and does function through the manifold planes of experience and grants fulfillment of all according to their ability and endowment. That is why Indian Spirituality has emphasized at the same time the oneness of the Divine Spirit and the hierarchy of stations and statuses of individuals and the performance of duties according to statuses and functions in the body-politic considered as the Universe, informed by the transcending Intelligence and controlled and sustained by it.

Within this large formulation which it had made for itself, it had thanks to the historical and geographical conditions, to adjust and accommodate the tides of cultures with their partial emphases on certain parts of the total structure of the Universe of the Divine. That is one of the primary reasons for the claim made by Hindu thought that it is *sanatana*, everlasting or perennial.

Thus the great dictum of Swami Vivekananda that Hinduism can accommodate every religion under its wide canopy, because its wide catholicity, -- the spiritual or mystic conception of Oneness of Spirit, -- includes all phases of Universal religion, all aims of personality and Nature.

In one sense, all the cultures and spiritual fruits that came to India through the invasions of Greeks, Persians, Arabs and Turko-mongols found a deeper meaning and profounder synthesis here. Enriched by their infiltration and even subdued by their force, Indian Spiritual thought rediscovered its own fountain-springs in them and regained the strength that it seemed to have lost. We find thus in the philosophic period of Indian Thought the ability of the Indian mind to adapt the Greek or *Yavana* methods to its own purposes. But this adaptation was more in the direction of social life. The rigidity that pervaded the class-consciousness of its people was broken or melted by this inner discovery. Buddhism and Jainism gave already the austere culture

of the soul and made for that large growth in catholic and humanitarian and disciplined life in the people of India as a whole and beyond the frontiers of India. But it was the challenge of the fanatical Islamic tradition that showed up the weakness and strength of Indian Mysticism. The social hierarchy writhed under the impact of this universalism and its deep concentration of monotheistic worship of the One Deity. Slowly emerged the seers and knowers who saw to no distinction between the spiritual aims of the one and the other, though the ways of living were adapted to different climates and ways of life. Uniformity is not necessarily the sign of fellowship ; what matters is the fellowship of spirits or souls in matters that are distinctly of greatest moment and value, love of God and love of men through God. Nanak , then Akbar and Dara, Kabir and his master Ramananda, Chaitanya and his disciples, found that there can be unity between the two great mystical religions from the level of spiritual life. Islam did emphasize one capital fact, the absolute necessity to follow, serve and worship the One and only Godhead. All life must be devoted to doing work for the God, who is one only. It also emphasized the importance of the Prophet or the Acharya or Guru who is the living Godhead. This too was not unknown to the Vedic Rishis, who gave us the Vedic mantra: *achaaryadevo bhava*. But the mystical doctrine of the Christians, who then poured into India and have ruled it, lies in the rediscovery of the service of God's children as an important means of attaining the love of God. *Bhagavata – aradhana* is such that it embraces all creatures ; and worship is not merely the adoration of God but sympathy and kindness and service of the lowly. Compassion or love is to be developed, for it forms a fundamental quality of civility or culture. Compassion is an element in spiritual life; *ahimsa* and *karuna* are possible truly to one who feels all as the children of the one Father.

The results of Mohammedan and Christian Rule in India were not altogether meaningless and terrible for Indian Culture: they made possible the synthesis of these Cultures. Thus in Śrī Ramakrishna, Śrī Aurobindo and Gandhiji, there is a synthesis of the triple spiritual traditions each revealing a unique expression of the possible future shape of Indian Mysticism. Similarly the influx of Western or American ways of life into India have profoundly altered these shapes. We no longer are presented with a real spiritual or mystical religious thought. We are meeting the challenge of a new philosophy

of materialistic life, whether it is from America or Russia. It is a challenge of matter or nature or human culture? Or is it a new demand made on the increasingly global consciousness of man, that is the question? Indian spiritual understanding hopes to accept this new situation and meet it with its inner vision, spiritual power and harmonising life of the one abiding Spirit which is the occult or secret of all existence, material and vital and spiritual. We find eager spirits like the leaders of the Oxford Movement in the West seeking unity with the leaders of spiritual thought in the East for the supreme purpose of making a new civilization emerge which shall be the monument to the wisdom and love and glory of God

Through spiritual understanding alone is real peace possible. Even economic and political adjustments for realising a peaceful World Order depend for their success on deep detachment from the pursuit of possessions and powers for the individuals, groups and nations. This detachment is a quality that belongs to the spiritual alone. In godliness we find our unity and fellowship ; in spiritual service of the Spirit behind all, we renew our love for all. Togetherness in all walks of life, without strife or bitterness or jealousy , is possible only through this realisation of God in all and all in God. As the Upanishad said: He who perceives the One Self in all and all beings in Him, he does not recoil from anything. There is no other path to unity or fellowship except surrender to the spiritual and dedication of all to God. *Nanyah pantha ayanaya vidyate*. This is the spiritual pattern of Cultural Fellowship possible and open to Mankind.