

## **Indian Culture and Western Thoughts: A Philosophical Insight on the Essence of Cultural Identity by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya**

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*Abstract:* Culture, which shaped our religious beliefs and practices, plays a significant role in preserving an age old civilization. Its value and impact on a group of persons, society, state or a nation is limitless. This paper demonstrates how our culture has the strength to uphold unity in such a diverse country like India. It also investigates the impacts of Western education and Christian missionaries in Indian society. In the course of the study, it also analyses the evolution of the Indian socio-political ideas and various institutions. The objective of this study is to highlight Upadhyaya's vision of future India so that every individual in India remains connected to its own original roots.

*Keywords:* dharma, regeneration, protestant, mendicant, etc.

### *Introduction*

Culture, which defines people's beliefs, values, behaviour and personal interests, is an integral part of every nation; it is transferred from one generation to another. Culture includes traditions, respects, values, customs, religion, arts, literatures, and other social practices and behaviours such as food, dressing styles, <sup>1</sup> languages, faiths, etc. Human beings across the globe communicate each other, feed themselves with food, and so on etc. However, they speak different languages, eat different types of food,

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and follow distinct faith and beliefs. When we compared world culture, similarities and differences, both, can be seen. Often, people of one culture may not agree with the values and beliefs of another culture, and as such, it became a major reason for causing various socio-political and ethical issues. But, why is culture important for a nation? According to Upadhyaya, culture allows us to maintain a national identity and it also helps individuals to find an identity which influences their daily lives. Culture taught us the values of humanity, respects, family, morality, openness and ethnicity. For me, the Bharatiya culture is a big part of 'my identity' and also what other can 'identify me'.

India is famous for its culture and tradition, where people of more than one religious culture live together. The culture of India reflects its social structure, beliefs, and religious inclination of Indian people. Some of its vital components are etiquette, good manners, beliefs, rituals, civilized communication and values. It is interesting to point out that despite these differences, there exists a strong bond of unity and that the people of different culture are socially interdependent. Indian culture constitutes an important part of our lives, and dealt with various social, ethical and political issues in the country. And, though culture is what separates us from other parts of the world, in our country, it brings people together and people from various backgrounds, traditions, languages, interests and skills co-exists together with respect.

### *Introduction of Western Education and the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*

Before the arrival of the British East India Company, India has Her own system of education and administration. The national life of India underwent significant change due to the spread of Western education, which was first introduced in India by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay. The introduction of Western education angered the majority of Indians because it decried Sanskrit literature; the traditional sense of values regarding of education, religion, culture, and sense of aesthetics underwent great change and new sense of imported values developed. It led to the emergence of a new class of people, who would be Indian in colour and blood,

but English in opinions, in taste, in intellects and in morals. And since 1935, the importance of indigenous literatures such as Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, etc. was reduced and English became the official language of the nation.

As a blessing in disguise, it introduced English education to Indian intellectuals, which freed their minds from the bondage of superstitions and the so-called socio-religious traditions and customs of the country. The liberal and democratic ideas of John Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, Wilberforce, and Cobden and the dedicated contributions of Mrs. Annie Besant and A. O. Hume inspired the educated Indians. Western doctrines such as nationalism, secularism, democracy, socialism, marxism, individualism, utilitarianism, etc also influenced many Indian thinkers. With the introduction of English education, the educated Indians began to question about the validity of every cultural practices, beliefs and customs, and everything that cannot be proved through scientific test and rational mind was rejected. Not only these, it led to reformation of new practices such as abolishment of untouchability, sati system, child marriage, prohibition on widow remarriage, dowry; added new values such as liberal humanism, secularism, welfare state, and egalitarianism to Indian values system; improved India's communication and transport systems; and promoted globalization of Indian economy by introducing efficient methods of production of goods and services. The Indian social reformers were aware of the fact that unless the socio-religious barriers, inequalities, superstitions and evil practices, were not removed, it would be impossible to transform India. In the words of Lala Lajpat Rai, "We want to preach a gospel of social democracy. We know that we cannot fly the flag of socialism, but the present constitution of society is wrong and unjust. It is cruel and barbaric. We want equal opportunity and equal justice for all."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the spread of English education, on the positive side, generated a spirit of national unity and national independence, and its knowledge and sciences helped the Indian to understand the weakness of the country; it awakens Indians' nationalist intimacy.

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<sup>2</sup> H. H. Das, *Indian Political Thoughts* (Jaipur: National Publishing House, 2015), 7.

On the negative side, Westernization in India reduced the religious values and cultural practices, affected indigenous social structures such as marriage, joint family, misuse of freedom, and the like. Due to British' policy of Divide and Rule, it planted communalism among various religions, regions and caste of India. It not only widened the gap between the educated and the uneducated Indians, but also resulted in the destruction of Hinduism due to large scale conversion of Indians to Christianity. The liberal writings of Voltaire, Robespierre, Rousseau, Milton, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Burke, J. S. Mill, Spencer, etc., considerably inspired the Indian intellectuals and political leaders to cherish the democratic spirit and the ideal of political liberty. If we look inside the emergence of India's nationalism, one can easily notice such predominant influence.

The British East India Company, which came to India as a trader, became the chief administrator of the country, and mercilessly exploited the Indian economy. Their incompetent and autocratic administration, favouritism, extortion, corruption, insensitivity and apathy towards the problems of Indian people impoverished the miseries and caused great resentment. The exploitative, arrogant and aggressive of the British rule has its reaction in the form of development of Indian renaissance, which contributed greatly to the growth of modern Indian nationalism. The European Renaissance, which liberated man from the clutches of moribund customs, superstitions, and the doctrine of original sin, was incorporated with the Hellenistic spirit of free unhindered intellectual enquiry, but revivalism was the dominant aspect of the intellectual Indian Renaissance. The Brahmo Samaj (1830) of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1837) had high admiration for Western culture, Christianity, education. Roy was against unnecessary rituals, idolatry and polytheism, and attempted to reinterpret Hinduism. Roy wanted to rebuild India on the Western model for he had immense faith in the western sense of equality, justice and fairness. According to Roy, India's progress could be achieved only by operating within the western system and by cooperating with the British rule. In his petition against the Press Revolution to the King-in-Council, he wrote, "Your dutiful subjects consequently have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors, but rather as

deliverers, and look up to Your Majesty not only as a ruler, but also as a father and protector.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1875, Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj as a reaction to the Brahmo Samaj. As a Hindu protestant reformation movement, the Arya Samaj was vehemently opposed to blind Western imitation, rejected Western culture, values, and religion, and asked the Indians to be proud of being a Hindu. His philosophy insisted to maintain Indian identity and the former greatness of ancient India and the pristine purity of the Vedic principles. The Arya Samaj, thus, strongly refuted the theory of Brahmo Samaj that without the British rule and western culture there could be no regeneration in India. Thus, the revivalism of the Arya Samaj, its emphasis on Vedic religion, self-confidence, pride in India's past traditions and cultural heritage, and its concept of sacrifice for the cause of the country and the people, its call for the Indians to give up the parasitical characters of other culture, etc., was a reaction against the ethics of Brahmo Samaj that the spirit of Western culture has pervaded the entire atmosphere of Indian society, and we think, breathe, move and feel in a western atmosphere.

Because of the clashes between these two predominant groups, it led to the emergence of two extremities: the Moderates and the Extremists, which represents the ideology and the philosophy of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj respectively. Although both these groups worked for the purification of Indian society and the Hindu religion, the former was eclectic and cosmopolitan, and tried to assimilate the good aspects of other cultures and religions, whereas the later was nationalistic and conservative in its approach, and aims at the revival of the great Bharatiya culture and the introduction of social and religious reforms. From these standpoint, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was known as the Father of Modern Indian Moderates. The Moderates leaders of the Congress, without any exception believed in the fair play of western systems; they followed a mendicant policy or the policy of petition and prayers, which have its origin to the Brahmo Samaj's ideology. The Extremists, on the other hand, who advocates a radical policy wanted them to be ousted from the country. As they were deeply

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<sup>3</sup> Das, *Indian Political Thoughts*, 11.

influenced by the preaching of the Arya Samaj, the philosophy and programme of action of the Extremists includes pride's in India's past glory, national identity spiritual nationalism, intense patriotism, an element of antipathy for the British rule, the preparedness to sacrifice for the cause of the country, etc. Indian political leaders like W. C. Bannerjee, Manmohan Gosh, Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pherizshaj Mehta, and so on were all known Indian Moderates for their softness towards this foreign rule. Such creed for extreme loyalty was reaffirmed by Gopal Krishna Gokhale when he quoted, "Our motto is reform, not revolution."<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, Extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Rajput Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, etc. were also influenced by the western thoughts, concepts of liberty, equality and rights, English institution and education, and personalities, however, they were differ from the Moderates as they do not want to be uprooted from their own culture and traditions.

#### *Indian Culture and Western Thoughts*

The Indian society is entirely dominated by Hindu culture. Some main features of the faith of Hindu culture consists of its different sides of philosophical basis, ethical character religious experience and traditional faith. The Indian culture is marked by its rational character and is based on the spiritual principles and realisation of ultimate truth. The Indians believed in the law of karma and accepted the spiritual truth' as preached in the Vedas and many sacred books of the Hindus. Everything in Hinduism consist of spiritual truths, devotion, mythology, philosophy, code of conduct, rituals, ethics, poetry, etc. Sacred books such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas provides religious guidance through legend's and stories; ancient Indian law books like Manusmriti provides the ethics for Hindus. The Vedas are considered as the fountainhead of Hindu culture. The Upanisadas also contains the philosophical truths realised by the Indian sages such as '*sarvam khamlu idam Brahma*', meaning '*oneness is everything*', and '*aham Brahma asmi*', meaning '*the individual is one with the universe*'. The Smiritis prescribes the social code and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26.

the personal code of conduct, starting from the most trivial daily acts on an individual to the highest philosophical wisdom and spiritual realisation to lead a good life. Then a question arises as to why Indian culture is unique? The approach of Indian culture is completely different from the rest of other cultures and religions. Unlike western culture, the goals of Indian culture is to improve the individual's quality of life in accordance with *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Here, the *dharma* stands for righteous living that results in a more meaningful life; the *artha* aims at the acquisition of wealth through rightful means; the *kama* means enjoyment of desire and pleasures without transgressing the social and religious norms; and the *moksha* means liberation from the bondage of birth and death. Apart from these four-fold *purusharthas* (goals of individuals), the Indian culture is also advocated the idea of complete renunciation and total control over all mental functions that lead men towards *mukti*. In classical Indian philosophy, schools of Buddhism and Jainism preaches for right knowledge, right faith, and right action. Hinduism stands for spiritual freedom, universal acceptance, prosperity and renunciation, which make it unique from other religions and culture. "Hinduism is inclusive religion. In comparison to this, every other religion is exclusive which at times make them more intolerant towards others. Only Hindu Dharma accepts every past and future religion as a valid path to the Divine, and also treats each of them as its own."<sup>5</sup>

The Indian leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak wanted a genuine reform of Indian society and does not entertain blind imitation of the West in the name of reformation. In an article, written by Tilak, in the *Kesari*, he explained his philosophy of social change. Tilak was not opposed to social reform brought about by growing enlightenment and progressive education, but firmly opposed to the creation of fractions and sections for social reform. He argued that people who have no faith in the primacy of spiritual principles have no moral right to impose their ill-conceived borrowed ideas of the West. Tilak believed that India's downfall responsible is due to the ignorance of Hindu religion. So, he think it as unwise to wipe out the Indian values for European ideas of rationalism, materialism and

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<sup>5</sup> Samarpan, *Living Hinduism: Scriptures Philosophy Practices* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2017), 18.

utilitarianism. As a nationalist, Tilak wanted a healthy foundation by restoring the vital traditions of India's ancient culture. However, Tilak's concept of nationalism was influenced by Wilson's concept of self-determination, and the Western ideal of national freedom. His nationalism was an integration of the Western ideas of Edmund Burke, Mazzini, J. S. Mill and Woodrow Wilson, and the Vedantic ideal of the spirit.

Rabindranath Tagore, in his book, '*Nationalism*', explained that the real problem for India is the problem of race unity. India, as a country with diverse race, the moral spirit of cooperation and brotherhood should not be limited by geographical boundaries; it should be the true basis for India's greatness. His philosophy calls for spiritual unity of all men. He added that the educated Indians, contrary to the lessons of our ancestors, has been trying to absorb some lessons from other people's history. He wrote, "Either you shut your doors against the aliens or reduce them into slavery. And this is your solution of the problem of race-conflict."<sup>6</sup> What Tagore meant by this statement was that to reform for India's national life, we do not need to borrow other foreign methods, but our own ideals evolved through our own history; it should not be guided by the impulse of competition and greed. India is not a beggar though others may think She is; She must have confidence in Her past glory and wisdom; our social instincts imposed restrictions in our pursuit of wealth and material gain. He was of the view that when we copy alien methods, the same social weakness may prevail in our own country, and as a result, we simply became a victim for other nations, and that is why China, even at Her darkest period, look upon other nations with Her best confidence. He wrote, "Japan, for example, thinks that She is getting powerful through adoption Western methods, but, after She has exhausted Her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to Her. She will not have developed Herself from within."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Tagore envisages us that our political freedom would not give us real freedom unless our mind is free from all unclean entanglements. In the same way, Upadhyaya's philosophy represented a confident

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<sup>6</sup> Ravindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Prakash Books India, 2015), 105.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 96.

Bharat that can be ready to meet the challenges with the help of its ancient wisdom rather than blindly aping of conflicting alien ideas which complicated the prevailing issues in the country.

*The Essence of Cultural Revival of Deendayal Upadhyaya for National Reconstruction*

Among the contemporary Indian intellectuals who consider Indian culture as the bedrock of a nation's foundation, notable figures such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Veer Savarkar, Sri Aurobindo, Krishnachandra Bhattacharya, and S. Radhakrishnan have emerged. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, a genuine Indian reformer, also belonged to this group of thinkers who perceived Indian culture as the guiding light for a country engulfed in darkness. In his lectures on Integral Humanism, Upadhyaya emphasized that the neglect of national identity is the fundamental cause of India's problems. He argued that without a strong sense of identity, India's independence loses its significance and the nation cannot progress and develop comprehensively. The lack of awareness about our national identity has hindered the realization of our full potential. Upadhyaya attributed this to the continued influence of colonial policies on various aspects of the Indian constitution even after gaining independence from British rule. Moreover, he criticized Indian leaders who blindly embraced foreign doctrines and pursued models or ideas for modernizing India. According to Upadhyaya, the suppression of our national identity by these alien policies hampers our progress and leads to numerous problems as a nation's natural instincts are stifled. Even those actively involved in the country's affairs remain oblivious to the root causes of these issues. Upadhyaya's holistic philosophy aims to rectify such situations and establish unity and discipline in society, as the neglect of India's rich traditions has resulted in their abandonment in the pursuit of development.

The main problem in the West was that they saw man as a political animal, thereby conferring upon him absolute sovereignty, and at the same time, they ignored the values of other aspects that are connected or related to men's lives. To be sure, as they perceived things separately, most of them resulted in faulty conclusions. In

Indian culture, there is no such separateness, and everything is seen as an integrated whole, not merely in collective or social life, but in individual life as well.

It can be noted that Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy is deeply rooted in Bharatiya culture, which is characterized by its integral nature and integrated perspective. Unlike the various 'isms' of the Western world, Upadhyaya does not endorse them as they can be seen as a tangled web of ideologies. Bharatiya culture recognizes and values the innate human instinct to live and places great importance on the pursuit of happiness. Upadhyaya acknowledges that the desire for lasting happiness is inherent in every individual. However, he criticizes the notion that sensory pleasure alone can bring true happiness, considering it to be a narrow understanding of the concept. According to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, "the cultural freedom of the nation is of utmost important because culture communicates like life in the entire body of the nation. The way of life that man creates in an attempt to conquer the elements of nature, and in the imagination of human perception, is his culture. Culture is never motionless but constantly moving; Yet it has an existence of its own. Though constantly moving like the flow of a river, it keeps her own personal characteristics, which are in the culture of the society producing that cultural attitude and with that cultural spirit the literature, art, philosophy, memory, scriptures, social creation of other nations. It is expressed in various parts of history and civilization. During the period of dependence all these get affected and the natural flow gets blocked. Being independent today, it is necessary that all the obstacles of our flow should be removed and we can develop according to our talent in all the areas of the nation."<sup>8</sup>

As far as the question of possibility that our culture can point the direction of the country's all-round progress, Upadhyaya is of the view that the concept of independence is closely intertwined with an individual's own cultural identity. Without culture serving as the foundation for independence, the pursuit of political autonomy would be reduced to a chaotic race driven by self-centred and power-hungry individuals. True significance can only be attributed to

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<sup>8</sup> R. S. Agnihotri, B. P. Shukal, eds., *Rastra Jivan Ki Disha* (Lucknow: Lokhit Prakashan, 2008), 33-34.

independence when it serves as a means to express and showcase our cultural heritage. This expression not only contributes to our advancement as a society, but also grants us the invaluable experience of joy. Hence, it has become imperative, both from a national and human perspective, to contemplate the principles of Bharatiya culture. "It is indeed surprising that those who claim to reform the society by removing dead traditions, themselves fall prey to some outdated foreign traditions."<sup>9</sup>

### *Concluding Observation*

It is observed that the birth of various 'isms' has greatly fascinated the minds of Indian intellectuals. However, as these ideas were unable to provide solutions to the problems faced by mankind, Upadhyaya was always doubtful about its principles and policies. According to Upadhyaya, a nation is not merely a geographical area or a political concept; it does not emerge from a social agreement, nor does it cease to exist if that agreement is dissolved. A nation emerges from a profound life-force; it is self-created, '*swayambhuha*'. While it has a historical development, history itself cannot fully describe it. Language, culture, and literature are certainly fundamental components of a nation's unity, but they are foundational because they reflect something even more essential to a nation, i.e. its unified or collective consciousness. These elements characterize the nation, rather than serve as its origin. The Integral Humanism of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya proposes that the classical Indian understanding of nation and nationality arises from a worldview that prioritizes creative harmony, seeing everything as interconnected. The individual, with his unique existence, legitimate self-interest, desires, and pursuit of happiness, finds fulfilment within the broader context of society: society derives meaning from the even larger existence of the nation, which in turn achieves its ultimate purpose by serving the universal interests of humanity. All these life units are interrelated, not arranged in a hierarchy, but exist in a natural, innate, and inviolable simultaneity of respect for life. These ideals, according to

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<sup>9</sup> S. S. N. Bakshi, *Deendayal Upadhyaya: Life of an Ideologue Politician* (New Delhi: Rupa Publication India, 2018), 75.

Upadhyaya, embody the essence of traditional Indian national life. They constitute the Indian consciousness, its vital life-force, the reason for its existence—its cultural identity. His philosophy propounded the idea that every nation possesses its distinct consciousness, which sets it apart from others. As long as that consciousness, the cultural identity, which is seen by Upadhyaya as the ‘soul’ of a nation, thrives, the nation lives; when it withers, the nation ceases to exist.

So, for Upadhyaya, the progress of humankind and the sustenance of life depends on its capacity to mould its nature towards the attainment of social goals. Therefore, he regards dharma as the fundamental and eternal principles that can bring about peace, harmony, and progress, both in man and society. Bharatiya culture is not concerned only with the salvation of the soul, but also for the body, mind, and intellect. As dharma is given the foremost place in our culture, his philosophy insisted that the government must maintain law and order in accordance with dharma; any chaos that can destroy dharma should be prevented. He said, “When nature is channelized according to the principles of Dharma, we have culture and civilisation. It is indeed this culture which will enable us to sustain and sublimate the life of mankind.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the cultural revivalism of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, in shaping a healthy foundation of Indian national life, thoroughly examined the life of an individual in an integrated manner, and set the aim of developing body, mind, intellect and soul in a balanced way. This ‘integrated-life’ constitutes the principle underlying our culture as well as its aims and goals. His philosophy tried to fulfil the diverse desires of humanity, ensuring that the pursuit of one aspiration does not clash with another. This holistic representation encompasses all four dimensions of an individual’s aspirations. Undoubtedly, the notion of a whole human being, an integrated individual, should serve as both our ultimate aim and the path we follow.

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<sup>10</sup> D. Upadhyaya, *Integral Humanism* (Noida: Jagriti Prakashan, 1992), 28-29.

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