

Our Cultural Heritage

Essay No. 01

For thinking minds to blossom for arts and science to develop a primary condition is a safe and secure society. A rich culture is impossible in a community of nomads where people struggle for life. India has got all the gifts of nature. Nature yielded enough food and man did not have to toil very hard for meeting the basic needs.

Accumulated store of symbols, ideas and material products associated with a social system. In India great civilization and cultures have flourished from time immemorial. The diversity of India is tremendous. It is a land of many languages. It is home to many ethnic groups. But there are certain common links which act as threads and prove unity among diversity. India has much great tradition.

Cultural heritage stands for things that have been passed on from earlier generations to the present generation. Of special significance are the works of literature, music and arts in all its forms and shades. India has a rich cultural heritage. It is a healthy blend of various cultures.

India can rightly boast of being one of the oldest civilizations of the world. The Indus Valley civilization is among the oldest and the best civilizations of the world. The people were fairly advance and had access to public baths, neat and clean houses good towns with wide roads and other best facilities.

The Vedas are the earliest documents of the human mind that we possess. The Vedas give us abundant information. There are four Vedas Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharv. In them we find freshness simplicity and charm and an effort to understand the mystery of the world.

The wisdom of our ancient epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata holds the eternal lesson of the victory of the good over evil. The Bhagvad Gita is a book full of philosophical principles. Lord Buddha preached that perfect happiness could be gained if one exercises control over one's pinions. Hinduism has a large number of gods and goddesses besides the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It allows its followers to worship God in any form they like.

Guru Nanak Dev the founder of Sikhism laid supreme stress on true faith simplicity purity of life an religious tolerance. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam are among the major religions followed in India.

Traditionally tolerance of all faiths is a part of our cultural heritage. India is a secular country and the state treats all religions equality.

Astrology and astronomy were quite popular in ancient India. aryabhata precisely calculated the time of solar eclipse more than two thousand years ago. The concept of zero was invented in India. India scientists of Indian origin like C.V Raman Subramanian Chandrashekhra, Hargobind Khorana and Venkataraman Ramakrishnan have won Nobel prizes for their contributions in the field of science.

Music is one of the oldest forms of expression of human thoughts and emotions. Indian music is based on the concept of ragas and tales. There are two major schools of classical music the Carnatic and the Hindustani Indian musicians like Bhimsen Joshi, M.S. Subhalkshmi, Kishori Amonkar, Pt. Jasraj, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Ustad Bismillah Khan, Ustad Zakir Hussains and others have popularized our music in India and abroad.

Dance in India has an unbroken tradition of over 2000 years. Its themes are derived from mythology, legends and classical literature. There are two main forms of dances in India. these are folk dance and classical dance. India dance is based on rasa, bhava and abhinaya. There are five main classical dance forms namely Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri kathak and Odissi. Others prominent dances are Kuchipudi and Mohiniattam.

India has a rich literary heritage. India also has a rich regional literature. Regional literature in fact has often contributed to the fostering of a national identity and a national culture. India has always been a linguistically diverse community. Sanskrit was only the language of the elite whereas prakrit and apbhramsha were more commonly spoken by the masses. During the Mughal rule Persian took the place of Sanskrit as the court language while Urdu and Hindustani were the language of the common masses in north India.

It is without doubt that India has a rich cultural heritage and that we have excelled in different spheres. However it should also be acknowledged that we have inherited some negative aspects of our culture as well. Division of society on the basis of division of labour gave birth to the caste system. The caste system created a gulf among people leading to disunity and conflicts in the society.

The philosophical thoughts of Raja Rammohan Roy , Dayanand Saraswati , Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev , Swami Vivekananda , Rabindranath Tagore , Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have contributed a lot to the enrichment of the Indian culture.

Culture is dynamic cross currents of other cultures always influence the culture of a country. It is more so in the present day world where distances virtually have ceased to exist. Let us keep our windows and doors open to other cultures and to their healthy influence but we should stand firm and tall and should not be swept off our feet.

Essay No. 02

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India's cultural heritage is a harmonious blending of an, religion and philosophy which is unique in the world. Some 4,000 years before the birth of Christ, the first- stirring of civilization occurred amongst the people of India. Till the end of the British Raj, India had been exposed to an unbroken sequence of civilizations. All this has only served to enrich our cultural tradition. All efforts should be directed towards nurturing this rich treasure.

India has a rich cultural tradition. There is a harmonious blending of art, religion and philosophy in the Indian culture. They are beautifully interwoven in the fabric of Indian way of life and thought. Indian culture is actually an outcome of continuous synthesis of different cultures and has absorbed many external influences in the course of history. The first stirring of civilization occurred amongst the people of India some 4,000 years before the birth of Christ. From those ancient times till recent past, we were exposed to unbroken sequence of civilizations. It is only the dynamism and the flexibility of Indian culture that enabled it to survive these foreign invasions and retain its originality and traditional character even after imbibing the best of these external influences.

Indian people, who are by nature tolerant and fatalists, did not at any time ridicule the traditions of foreign civilizations. On the other hand, Indian mind has assimilated much of the thinking of the other cultures, thus enriching itself and thereby becoming unique in its character. Today, it is this uniqueness which attracts the western societies to the Indian culture. Disillusioned with their materialistic pattern of lives they turn to India for solace and peace.

The wisdom of our ancient epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata serves as a beacon light to the seekers of spiritual bliss and holds eternal lessons of the victory of good over evil. In the Bhagvad Gita Krishna tells how every human being can come to live the subtle

philosophical principles laid down in our scriptures in the actual to-day life. Lord Buddha taught us to follow the middle path exercising control over the passions. One has to admit that Indian sages and philosophers had started pondering on great issues 2000 years ago which have been raised in the west only in the last century.

Indian art was influenced by the religious beliefs and the philosophical trends of the times. The temples of the south, the caves of Ajanta Ellora and Khajuraho are living testimony to the artistic excellence achieved by the Indian artists, sculptors and architects in those gone by days. Foreign tourists experience a spiritual reawakening on visiting these temples.

Indian music is remarkable because of the continuity in its growth. Long before Christianity, it had developed not only definite laws of theory and practice, but even comprehensive theories of appreciation. Like Indian dance, it is built on the concepts of ragas and talas. Each raga is regarded as appropriate to certain emotion, a certain mood, suitable for certain time of the day or night. There are two major schools of classical music—the Hindustani and the Carnatic. Both derive their rules from the classical treatises Natya Shastra of Bharata and Sangeet Ratnakar by Sarangdeva. There are about 250 ragas commonly used in north as well as south. Indian music has had great impact on the western music. Great maestros like Pandit Ravi Shankar, Zakir Hussain, etc. have made valuable contribution towards popularising and promoting appreciation for Indian music abroad.

The background of Indian dance is infinitely rich and as varied as the land itself yet with the same underlying unity which binds the people of the country together. The dances of India, whether folk or classical are an eloquent expression of an ancient civilization, whose timeless wisdom continues to evoke the passionate search of man for conscious identity with God. Folk and tribal dances of India are of innumerable types. But they all express the people's natural gaiety, sense of abandon and rhythm. The origin of classical dances is from the Hindu temples. It was in the temples that they were first conceived and nourished. It was also in the temples that they attained their full stature. While it is true that dances were also performed in Courts, festive occasions, etc. yet the impulse that gave them birth was religious.

There are four major systems of classical dances in India—Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Manipuri. Other prominent dances are

Kuchipudi of Andhra, Odissi of Orissa, and Mohiniattam of Kerala. As in all performing arts, so in dance the concept of rasa holds the central place. In dancing rasa is conveyed through behavior or expression, through the technique of abhinaya. One of the latest developments in the field of dance is ballet, which has brought about a synthesis of the lyricism, grace and pictorial quality of Indian dance forms—both classical and folk.

Since Independence, Indians themselves have become increasingly keen to promote their sense of national identity and cultural unity.

Consequently there has been a revival of interest in indigenous folk arts, especially in the realm of music and dance. Now, it is up to our educational institutions to ensure that the younger generation imbibes the right values and tries to uphold the torch of spiritual and cultural renaissance for the rest of the world to see and emulate and not get carried away by the materialistic ideology of the west, where man has achieved astounding success in unraveling the mysteries of nature, but feels alienated and rootless in his own community and society. We must ensure that modern India does not at any stage forget its rich cultural heritage, a legacy of our ancient seers, philosophers and sages.

The success with which Festivals of India have met with in the U.S.A., France, the former U.S.S.R. and Japan proves the interest of foreigners in our cultural traditions. At home too, the government's efforts to promote a revival of interest in our folk arts, music and dance have met with tremendous public response. People of Delhi saw Apna Utsav a few years back and learnt many things along with most modern stage techniques.

The classical theatre has a tradition of more than 2,000 years. Dramas were mainly performed on platforms raised in temple courtyards and palaces. The choice of themes was varied. Although mainly taken from folk stories, epics and religious texts, it was an elaborate affair and Combined dance, acting and music.

Historically speaking, with the passing of early Hindu kingdoms—under whose patronage the arts had flourished in India—and the Muslim invasion of the North, the dramatic tradition almost died in the North. However, south of India retained a remarkable continuity of its cultural heritage virtually because of its geographical position, where the foreign invaders did not meet with much success. It goes to the credit of Indian

peoples tenacity and ability that they Were able to retain their essential traditional outlook in spite of fierce onslaughts by invaders.

The British Raj to a certain extent was responsible for the recovery of intellectual curiosity. A deep interest Was taken in the story of India s past ,and to preserve the country s rich cultural heritage. It was a sign of maturity and foresight on the part of the British to leave the people to follow their faith and belief they were not aware. All these are attempts to keep our cultural heritage alive and transmit it to the younger generations.