

PROSE



INDIAN CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

Mahatma Gandhi

MOHAN DAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI (1869-1948), popularly known as *Bapu* or the Father of the Nation, was more a spiritual leader than a politician. He successfully used truth and non-violence as the chief weapons against the British rule in India and helped India gain independence. From 1915 till 1948, he completely dominated Indian politics. He died at the hands of a fanatic on 30 January, 1948. His autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, and the numerous articles that he wrote for *Young India* and the speeches that he delivered on different occasions, reveal him not only as an original thinker but also as a great master of chaste, idiomatic English. In the following extract '*Indian Civilization and Culture*,' Gandhiji talks about the sound foundation of Indian civilization which has successfully withstood the passage of time. The western civilization which has the tendency to privilege materiality cannot match the Indian civilization that elevates the moral being.



A. Answer the following questions orally:

- 1 What do you know about Gandhiji?
- 2 What did Gandhi do for the farmers in Bihar?
- 3 What do you understand by civilization and culture?
- 4 What do our holy scriptures tell us about universal human values?

INDIAN CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

1. I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the

same **fate**, the might of the **Pharaohs** was broken, Japan has become westernized; of China nothing can be said, but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition.

2. In the midst of all this, India remains **immovable** and that is her **glory**. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and **stolid**, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the **anvil** of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the **sheet anchor** of our hope.
3. Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are **convertible** terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our minds and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means "good conduct".
4. If this definition be correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be.
5. We notice that the mind is a restless bird, the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge in our passions, the more **unbridled** they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition.
6. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors **dissuaded** us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our **indigenous** education remains the same as before. We have had no system of **life-corroding** competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regular wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our **moral fibre**. They, therefore, after due **deliberation** decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet.
7. They further reasoned that large cities were a **snare** and a useless **encumbrance** and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and

robbers, prostitution and **vice flourishing** in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages.

8. They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and the *Fakirs*. A nation, with a constitution like this, is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior. Moreover, these *Vakils* and *Vaids* did not rob people; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no **touts** to lure people into them. This evil too was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.

B.1. 1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of what you have studied :

- India's glory is that it
- The charge against India is that
- We dare not change what
- Our ancestors set a limit to our indulgences because
- Our forefathers did not invent machinery because

B.1. 2. Answer the following questions briefly :

- How is Indian civilization different from European civilization?
- Why does Gandhi say that 'mind is a restless bird'? What makes the mind restless?
- Why did our ancestors dissuade us from luxuries and pleasures? Did they do the right thing?
- Why, according to Gandhi, have we stuck with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago? Should we do the same thing even today?
- How did our ancestors view large cities? Why were they satisfied with small villages?
- How did our ancestors enjoy true 'Home Rule'?

9. The Indian civilization, as described by me, has been so described by its **votaries**. In no part of the world, and under no civilization, have all men attained perfection. The tendency of Indian civilizations is to **elevate** the moral being, that of the western civilization is to **propagate** immorality. The latter is godless; the former is based on a

belief in God. So understanding and so **believing**, it **behoves** every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to the mother's breast.

10. I am no hater of the West. I am thankful to the West for many a thing I have learnt from Western literature. But I am thankful to modern civilization for teaching me that if I want India to rise to its fullest height, I must tell my countrymen frankly that, after years and years of experience of modern civilization, I have learnt one lesson from it and that is that we must **shun** it at all costs.
11. What is that modern civilization? It is the worship of the material, it is the worship of the brute in us – it is **unadulterated** materialism, and modern civilization is nothing if it does not think at every step of the triumph of material civilization.



12. It is perhaps unnecessary, if not useless, to weigh the merits of the two civilizations. It is likely that the West has evolved a civilization suited to its climate and surroundings, and similarly, we have a civilization suited to our conditions, and both are good in their own respective spheres.
13. The distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of human wants. The characteristic of ancient civilization is an imperative restriction upon, and a strict regulating of, these wants. The modern or western **insatiableness** arises really from want of living faith in a future state and therefore also in Divinity. The restraint of ancient or Eastern civilization arises from a belief, often in spite of ourselves, in a future state and the existence of a Divine Power.
14. Some of the immediate and brilliant results of modern inventions are too maddening to resist. But I have no manner of doubt that the victory of man lies in that resistance. We are in danger of **bartering** away the permanent good for a momentary pleasure.
15. Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul.
16. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not **enamoured** of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom has prevented India from

progressing along those lines, so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the **onrush** of materialism.

17. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilizations. Cast a look around you. Where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of **Gibbon**, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy?
18. Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then coming to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look around you and you would be constrained to say, "yes, I see here ancient India still living".
19. True, there were dungheaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.
20. Our civilization, our culture, our Swaraj depend not upon multiplying our wants – self-indulgence, but upon restricting wants – self denial.
21. European civilization is, no doubt, suited for the Europeans but it will mean **ruin** for India if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and assimilate whatever may be good and capable of **assimilation** by us, as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it.
22. The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is such an evil and I make bold to say that the Europeans themselves will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves. It may be that my reading is wrong, but I know that for India to run after **the Golden Fleece** is to court certain death. Let us engrave on our hearts the motto of a Western philosopher: "Plain living and high thinking". Today it is certain that the millions cannot have high living and we the few, who profess to do the thinking for the masses, run the risk, in a vain search after high living, of missing high thinking.
23. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone increases and promotes contentment, real happiness and capacity for service.
24. A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary but above a certain level it becomes a **hindrance** instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a **delusion** and a snare. The satisfaction of one's physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one's narrow self, must meet at a certain point a dead stop, before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. A man must arrange his physical and cultural circumstances so that they do not hinder him in his service of humanity on which all his energies should be concentrated.

B.2. Answer the following questions briefly

1. What, according to the author, is modern civilization?
2. What did the author convey to the countrymen about dealing with modern civilization?
3. What is the distinguished characteristic of modern civilization?
4. The author perceived danger from modern inventions. How?
5. What does the author prefer to materialism?
6. What does our civilization depend upon?
7. What is civilization in the real sense of the term?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

evolved (v): caused to develop

fate (n): destiny

Pharaohs (n): rulers of ancient Egypt

immovable (adj): unwavering, firm

glory (n): magnificence, beauty

stolid (adj): slow-witted

anvil (n): a metal block on which a blacksmith shapes metal objects with hammer

sheet anchor (n): security

convertible (adj): exchangeable, that can be converted

unbridled (adj): unrestrained, uncontrolled

dissuaded (v): advised against, persuaded against

indigenous (adj): native, home-grown

life-corroding (adj): destroying life gradually

moral fibre (n): character

deliberation (n): reflection, consideration and discussion

snare (n): trap

encumbrance (n): burden

vice (n): evil, wickedness

flourishing (v): thriving, growing in a healthy manner

touts (n): persons employed in soliciting customers

lure (v): entice, tempt

votaries (n): devotees

elevate (v): raise, exalt

propagate (v): spread ideas, beliefs etc more widely

behoves (v): be right or necessary

cling (v): adhere, stick

shun (v): keep away from

unadulterated (adj): complete

insatiableness (n): state of not being satisfied

bartering (v): exchanging goods, property etc

enamoured (v): be in love with, delighted with

onrush (n): surge, flow

Gibbon (n): the English historian of the eighteenth century who authored the famous book *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

ruin (n): destruction

assimilation (n): integration

the Golden Fleece (n): an object very difficult to attain. The Golden Fleece of Greek mythology was well protected by snakes and flames, and to secure it Jason had to employ the magic of Media.

hindrance (n): something or somebody that obstructs

delusion (n): misleading; misconception

C. 1. Long Answer Questions

1. 'I BELIEVE that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world.' What does Gandhi mean by this statement? Do you subscribe to his views?
2. 'We notice that the mind is a restless bird, the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied.' Pick out other metaphors used in the lesson. How do these metaphors help Gandhiji in persuading the readers?
3. 'A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy.' What, according to Gandhi, holds key to real happiness? How does Gandhi define 'happiness'?
4. Why did our ancestors feel satisfied with small villages? Did they do the right thing? Will it be wise today to follow our ancestors in this connection? Give your own view.
5. Discuss the negative features of western civilization.
6. What is the essential difference between the Indian civilization and the Western civilization? How is our civilization superior to the Western civilization?
7. A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary but above a certain level it becomes a hindrance instead of help.' Elaborate.

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. Truth and non-violence have been the biggest weapons of mankind.
2. High thinking can not go alongside high living.

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about **100 words** on each of the following:

- a. The real dignity of man lies not in what he has but in what he is.
- b. The crown and glory of life is character.

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

disuaded	ocupation	votries	imorality	unadultereted
matarialism	beleif	madning	engrev	harmoney

Ex. 2. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common

reason	thinking	wants	ruin	copy
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D.2. Word-formation

Read carefully the following sentence taken from the lesson:

*Each followed his own **occupation**..*

In the above sentence the word 'occupation', which is an abstract noun, is derived from the verb 'occupy'. Now, derive abstract nouns from the verbs given below and use them (abstract nouns) in sentences of your own:

convert	perform	define	please	educate	observe
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D.3. Word-meaning

Ex 1. Find from the lesson words the meanings of which have been given in **Column A**. The last part of each word is given in **Column B**:

A	B
someone related who lived long time agotor
of one's homelandnous
being a burden toance
to spread ideas, beliefs, etcate
slow-wittedlid
advise againstade
exchange goods, property etcter

Ex. 2. Fill in the blanks with suitable words (gerunds) from the given list:

living thinking writing bartering maddening

- (i) Pragya's is not very legible.
- (ii) The police could not control the crowd.
- (iii) We are in danger of away the permanent good for a momentary pleasure.
- (iv) Gandhi always believed in simple
- (v) Amandeep's..... was quite logical.

D. 4. Phrases

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use these phrases in sentences of your own:

satisfy with be suited to believe in cling to in vain

E. GRAMMAR

Read the following sentence from the lesson carefully:

*We are **dazzled** by the material progress that western science has **made**.*

In the above sentence '**dazzled**' and '**made**' are past participles of the verbs 'dazzle' and 'make' respectively.

Ex. 1. Complete the sentences given below by using the appropriate forms of the verbs given in brackets:

- a. Indian Civilization has it alive till now. (keep)
- b. I see here ancient India still (live)
- c. We have many things from western literature. (borrow)
- d. We have been west since long. (copy)
- e. Arya did so. (speak)
- f. Nehru had so many letters to his daughter from jail. (write)

Ex.2. Study the following sentence from the lesson

*We notice that the mind is a restless bird, **the more it gets the more it wants....***

Mark the use of double comparative in the above sentence. Look at the examples given in the table:

The + comparative (1st)	The + comparative (2nd)
The harder you work,	the better you achieve
The more she earns	The more she wants

Form ten sentences of your own choice on this pattern

F. Activity

Gandhi and Nehru lived in the same era. Both of them played very significant roles in building modern India. Ask your history or political science teacher or consult reference books to find out their views on civilization and modernisation.

Do a project work on 'India's march towards modernization'.

