

## Fundamental Tenets of Vedic Culture

The paramount distinction of the Vedic culture is its spiritual attitude towards life and the world. Deciphering the sublime root-element of the material existence rather than analyzing just its gross structure and properties; realization of the higher and deeper realms of eternity, continuity and incessant purity of life far above its mortal, momentary, physical manifestation; experience of the cosmic, the collective, rather than the individual consciousness; have been the basis of this Vedic culture. It was only on this land that research on the Sublime Transcendent and Cosmic Force governing all the powers and activities of Nature was initiated and pursued to the ultimate depths. This Cosmic Force is regarded absolute, preeminent and supreme in our Darshan shastras (philosophical literature). Although there could be differences in its interpretations, explanations, and styles of expression, all our ancient literature, philosophies, science, arts and sadhana procedures, etc, revolve around this Eternal Truth. This is what has been the focus and ultimate aim of the genesis and expansion of the grand knowledge and unparalleled developments of the Vedic Age.

Our talents of yore were not so well off materialistically because they had not given prime importance to it over the infinite wealth of the inner world. The penny-less sages and sadhu-sanyasis were given more importance and honour than the mighty kings. A rishi, an ascetic yogi is considered far more dignified and prestigious in our culture than the worldly resourceful, affluent dignitaries. This is why our country has gifted such a rich galaxy of great sages, seers, saints and savants to the world. It has produced great men and women, who saved the world from malice and division and sowed the seeds of love and integration for mankind; they taught and propagated the message of peace and co-existence against conflict, violence, cutthroat competition and savagery. Therefore, the world still regards India as the torchbearer of light of truth. The global prestige and respect of India is mainly because of its spiritual foundations and deeply insightful philosophy and science of spirituality.

That spirituality was the core of the Vedic way of life does not mean that we had neglected or looked down upon healthy progress in the worldly pursuits. Our history bears witness to the fact that our religion, our science, our archaeology, our sculpture, our architecture, our astronomy, our mathematics, our arts, our commerce, trade, economy, etc were all at the top of the world and this had made fundamental contributions to the growth and enrichment of human civilization and culture.

Celebrity Greek scholar Arian has mentioned thus about ancient Indians – "The Indians who had travelled up to Greece and had inhabited and ruled over (influenced) the people here were very prosperous. They appeared to be the descendants of cherubic powers. They possessed lots of gold and jewels. They used to wear gorgeous silky shawls and precious pearl-necklaces...". Many of the Greek historians have also recorded similar observations – "The Indians who migrated to this land (ancient Greece) were very intelligent and talented. They propagated knowledge and taught medicine; they helped civilizing the natives here and won their confidence and respect....".

The Indian Culture has given an ideal philosophy and mode of life to mankind where there is no place for hatred, malice, mutual struggle, exploitation or oppression.

### **The social system of Varna1 and Asharma2**

Asharma: Four phases of one's life for ideal combinations of duty-bond, cheerful, prosperous and progressive life; each of about 25 year for an average span of 100 years of life. The first, Brahmacharya Ashrama was supposed to be the age of education and personality development in the Gurukuls; the second, the Grahasth Ashrama was meant to be for worldly growth, marriage, and contribution to the healthy progress of the family and society. The Vanaprastha and Sanyasa, Ashramas of the later phases of the life were set for dedication to social welfare after completing the familial responsibilities and for spiritual enlightenment and evolution of one's life. Established here is an excellent model of ideal development of one's personality and harmonious collective progress.

Our family system still remains a peerless example of cultivating love, peace and cooperation in every domain of human life. The democratic, federal and republic systems of governance in ancient India added to its glorious expansion and stability. The so-called liberal philosophy and socialist system was successfully adopted in our way of life since the time of yore. The divine majestic mottos of "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" (may all beings be happy), "Sarveshama Avirodhena, Brahmakarma Samarabhe" (performing noble duties without any conflict with anyone), "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (treating the entire world as a family), etc, had originated here and continue echoing in people's life here.

Injustice, selfishness, discrimination and cruelty were not allowed in the Indian life in any respect. Those disturbing the social harmony and collective cooperative life were penalized as criminals. The concept and design of a system for safe, terror-free, tussle-free, and stress-free, peaceful and happy progress of personal and social life was founded and first implemented under the auspices of the Vedic Indian Culture.

The Indian Culture does not approve of a dry, isolated, dull life or escapism in the name of spirituality, sadhana, etc. Those who regard it thus are under a wrong impression or have not been introduced to it correctly. There are so many religious and social festivals in our system, which involve collective cultural activities and celebrations in varieties of forms quite frequently throughout the year and induce joy and energy in the personal and social life. Not only that, the rituals and customs originally associated with these parvas and tyoharas are based on healthy psychological conditioning and uplifting and serve as effective measures for the treatment and positive orientation of people's psychology.

The scientifically devised education system for ideal development of a civilized and cultured personality and virtuous talents is another significant component of the Indian Culture. Spending the most important developmental phase of life in the gurukuls of the wise, sagacious Rishis since childhood, learning the shastric knowledge from them and intense practical training from their noble life, following the disciplines of brahmacharya3 and altruist service, living and playing in the lap of Nature, and staying in a family like ambience of the gurukul with the other students of different socio-economic backgrounds

— all these used to work wonderfully in the integral growth and education of the young student - inmates.

The system of Sodas **samskaras** similarly was an excellent mode of psychological and emotional elevation and prior training of a person at different transitional phases of his lifespan. As the purification, subtilization and fine processing of the raw herbs convert them into a lifesaving, nectar - like medicine, Sodas **samskaras** work as effective remedies towards initiating the internal and external refinement of one's personality.

It was this bequest of the Indian **culture** that had nurtured multi-talented development of the people from all walks of the society. This is why India was a pioneer and leader in the diverse fields of commerce and trade, archaeology, agriculture, artillery, astronomy, medicine, music, dance and other forms of creative arts. The first ever-scientific instruments and methods of experiments were also devised on this land of the Vedic Rishis. The ethics of humanity, orderly and disciplined mode of progressive life – ranging from healthy eating habits, nature-friendly life-style, to scientific attitude and orderly social system, were all devised and adopted first in this country.

The supremacy of the Indian culture, which also is the core of its global benevolence and respect, is its openness and accommodating and adaptive attitude towards all faiths. It can embrace all cultures in its liberal folds. It is founded on such universal principles and values that it can't clash with any other culture. As the diverse currents of different rivers commingle in the ocean, similarly, all the cultures of the world are merged and absorbed in the Vedic Indian Culture. Another reason for this natural confluence is the fact that the Vedic **Culture** has been the origin of all ancient cultures of the world. The world history has witnessed that the Roman, Egyptian, Greek, Sindhu, and other cultures have mostly remained the topics of research or archaeological museums, but despite hundreds of years of foreign invasion, occupation, political slavery and adversities, the Indian **culture** has gloriously maintained its vivid existence and global reputation.

Indeed, the Indian **culture** has convincingly proved its liberal and accommodating nature and the eternity of its foundational elements. While the mutual conflicts between other cultures of the world have often been the cause of persistent malice, wars and disastrous bloodshed, the Indian **culture** has always been an exponent of non-violence, love, affection, amity, cooperation and compassion. As the learned Poet Mahadevi Verma puts it — "This grand nation has a gigantic **culture** that encompasses a superb conjunction and confluence of science and philosophy and diverse currents of thoughts, experiences and ethical principles. Our **culture** is truly a unique expression of universality".

Another inspiration of this **culture** is the attitude of sacrifice for altruist purposes. While the occidental and other cultures have advocated materialistic comfort and possession-based notion of joy and success, our **culture** has taught austerity and asceticism for noble goals. Distribution for welfare and social service rather than self-obsession and possession of resources is a great basic value of our culture. "Yajna" the eternal symbol of altruism, dedication, sacrifice and noble deeds is regarded as the father of this divine culture.

The best way to understand and measure the depth of our invaluable culture is to adopt its great values in our conduct, in every act of our life, and set a living example of its preeminence today. The dreaded threats to the very existence of humanity, the ever - rising world crisis and calamitous adversities of the present times have made it all the more important and relevant today to adopt this culture of loving kindness, compassion and universality. It holds practical universal solutions to the gigantic problems of this critical phase of human history. It also holds the 'magical key' to a bright future of global peace and happiness.

**Notes:**

1. Varnas: The system of four varnas was a social classification according to one's attitude, character and deeds and was later on associated with family-profession. The misconceptions of medieval times misinterpreted it with caste and creed.
2. Ashrama: Four phases of one's life for ideal combinations of duty-bound, cheerful, prosperous and progressive life; each of about 25 year for an optimum span of 100 years of life. The first, Brahmacharya Ashrama was supposed to be the age of education and personality development in the Gurukuls; the second, the Grahasth Ashrama was meant to be for worldly growth, marriage, and contribution to the healthy progress of the family and society. The Vanprastha and Sanyasa, Ashramas of the later phases of the life were set for dedication to social service after completing the familial responsibilities and for spiritual enlightenment and evolution of one's own life.
3. **Brahmcharya** – the discipline of physical and mental chastity. It incorporates piety of character, stability of mind and body for natural avoidance or continence of erotic thinking, carnal desire and sexual indulgence.

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A devotee used to offer water to Lord Shiva after bathing in The Ganga. One day he met a sick man, on his way to the temple who was burning with high fever. The sick man entreated the devotee to give him water to quench his thirst but the devotee refused saying that it was for the Lord. At night the devotee dreamed of the Lord being ill. He asked for the reason. The Lord said that you did not help the sick, a living form of divinity, and bathed my symbolic idol with it instead. That was a sin for me, and as a result I am sick. From the next day the devotee started selflessly and lovingly serving the poor and the needy as living idols of his Lord. This he considered as true worship thenceforth.