

The fundamental principle of Hindu Culture as revealed in the most ancient Samskrit Literature.

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The cultural history of India is indeed unique. It is perhaps more interesting than her political history. It is singularly of great importance, not only for an inquisitive antiquarian, but also for a serious student of world-culture. No other culture can perhaps trace back its history to the most remote ancient period and can consequently present to the view of sincere savants, a pre-eminently peculiar panorama of scenes of all-absorbing nature. This landscape, thus opened to our vision, discloses far-stretching forces of human activity at work, making countless currents to flow in various divergent directions, with one music as it were, in the ceaseless processes of self-expression and self-adjustment. When most of the well-known nations of the world which later on made great name and fame were either not born at all or, if born, were still in their period of infantile tutelage, India had attained the highest pinnacle of cultural glory by propounding profound systems of philosophy, laying down regulations for social and political organizations, diving deep in the mysteries of life and death by introspective investigations, and breathing out in exquisite and incomparable poetry, the perfect equilibrium of her soul. What we see is a clear plain picture of an all-round progress and an all-sided development, not in any particular age, but for ages and ages together. As far as the history of the ancient world has taken us into her confidence, we know that

no other nation could show such a long continuity of remarkable activity.

To-day India is known to the cradle of only philosophical and religious thoughts. It is quite natural. When power passed out of her hand and she was unable to make her will felt, it was inevitable that her organizations of every type should be thrown into disorderly confusion. But it is not unknown to impartial scholars what the achievements of social and political philosophers of India were. The history of civilizations has, moreover, shown invariably that even mental and moral development presupposes economic activity and progress. With all its imperfections, Hindu society as it survives will appear to many, in many respects, far superior to any form of social organization attained on a large scale anywhere else, and perhaps infinitely superior to the social order which we know as "modern civilization." The truth is that India was able to occupy and maintain her matchless pre-eminent position in the civilized world of ancient times in every department of human activity for an incredibly continuous long time. In order to find out her past achievements and to evaluate properly her cultural attainments, we have no better means at our disposal than the Samskrit literature. It was a wonderful fortune of divinely devised nature, as it were, that the ancient Aryans could have such a language as Samskrit, the medium of their extensive and intensive thoughts.

In course of time, as it came to be handled by the sage-grammarians and linguistic philosophers, it became one of the most perfect and elastic of all human speeches. It was in fact, in times of yore, the sole medium of communication among the cultured classes. It was only through it that the sages and bards of immortal memory gave expression to their profound philosophical and poetic thoughts. It indeed enjoyed for ages the unrivalled position of being a worthy vehicle of higher learning and culture and went very far in supplying the nation with all that a perfect language can, for making genuine progress in all spheres of national life. It was only after discovering Samskr̥t that the West has been led to find out the significance of Samskr̥t literature and the place of Hindu thought in the cultural history of the world. Samskr̥t literature, if properly examined, cannot but bring home to every honest student of culture-history, the cultural uniqueness of the Aryans of India.

What particularly strikes even a casual student of Samskr̥t literature is its unbroken long continuity coupled with the vast extent of subjects it has to deal with. Even after the wholesale destruction of numerous works in various ways, it is far superior to many a nation of the world in the possession of invaluable treasures in the form of published and unpublished works. But it is not only the number of extant works which so much attracts the attention of scholars; it is, in fact, the number of subjects it treats of that really matters. No conceivable subject, no department of human knowledge, appears to be unrepresented in the Samskr̥t literature. In accordance with the fourfold division of the ends to be realized in

human life, namely, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*, Samskr̥t literature also can be divided into four such divisions. It will be found that no section has been absolutely starved at the expense of another, each being properly and adequately provided for. Thus we see that the harmonious development of the ancient Hindu culture in various departments of national life is clearly borne out, not only by the indubitable evidence of history but also by the trustworthy testimony of Samskr̥t literature. It is, in fact, in this language and literature that we find the heart of India revealed.

Samskr̥t literature leaves no doubt as regards the uniqueness of the Hindu culture which marks it out quite distinctly from that of all other nations of the world. But what we want to discuss very particularly here is the problem whether we can find out the cause or causes which enabled the ancient Hindus to evolve such a long-lasting culture. We are to see how and why they could achieve so much and their achievements could endure in the world for such a long time and to such an extent that even now they command respect from the civilized world. Even here Samskr̥t literature can help us quite materially. It is in the Samskr̥t literature that we find the oldest specimens of intellectual activity, the earliest patterns of emotional outbursts and the most ancient documents of religious and philosophical speculations brought forth and kept up with assiduous care anywhere and at any time by the members of the human race. Thorough investigation of the history of Samskr̥t literature can clearly make every sincere enquirer understand the conditions which obtained in those

hoary days of vast antiquity and the workings of the Āryan mind under those conditions. So it can be a safe guide in our search for that undercurrent which gave a peculiar strength to persist, to pull on vigorously in spite of so many odds; it will take back our imagination to realize vividly that inner energy which imparted a peculiar tone to everything created and brought about a wonderful atmosphere for the upkeep and maintenance of all that was created.

In order to find out and understand that principle of life let us, by way of helping ourselves in this search with a clue, try to recognize its outward expression, which even now marks out to some extent the Hindu culture from other cultures of the world. It is undoubtedly the philosophical outlook, the idealistic view of life. In Europe and America, the study of philosophy is a kind of luxury and not a real necessity. It is not considered a means but forms an end in itself; and, as such, it seems of but little importance to the ordinary man. "In India, on the other hand, philosophy is not regarded primarily as a mental gymnastic, but rather, and with deep religious conviction, as our salvation (*Mokṣa*) from the ignorance (*Avidyā*) which for ever hides from our eyes the vision of reality. Philosophy is the key to the map of life, by which are set forth the meaning of life and the means of attaining its goal. It is no wonder, then, that the Indians have pursued the study of philosophy with enthusiasm, for these are matters which concern all." This vital difference has existed for all time, not only in the conception of philosophy but also, as it naturally follows, in its application to the evolution of the various spheres of ideal national life. Idealism in the

fields of social and political organizations, is deemed by the western seers, not only unnecessary, and unpractical, but supremely dangerous. But in India, the case has been quite the reverse. The ancient sages of India thought that anything done without understanding the real aim and goal of life, was mere waste of energy. The philosophy of life must be, first of all, very clearly and carefully understood and then all activity should be directed in accordance with that philosophy in view. So the most conspicuous character of the Hindus, has been, in every period of their history in general, and in the ancient period in particular, an honest and constant effort to understand the meaning and purpose of life, and a deliberate attempt to organize the individual and social activities perfectly in consonance with it. With the strength of this special character with them, the Hindus were quite successful in evolving a harmonious system of social and political organizations, very particularly as long as power to enforce their will was with them. "The Hindus grasped more firmly than others", says Ananda kumar Swami, "the fundamental meaning and purpose of life and, more deliberately than others, organized society with a view to the attainment of the fruit of life; and this organization was designed not for the advantage of a single class, but, to use a modern formula, to take from each according to his capacity, and to give to each according to his needs." Such a purposive organization could not but result in perfect harmony. It cannot be better described than in the incomparable phraseology of M. Romain Rolland—"There is no negation. All is harmonized. All the forces of life are grouped like a forest, whose thousand waving arms are led by Natarāja, the

master of the dance. Everything has its place, every being has its function, and all take part in the divine concert, their different voices and their very dissonance creating, in the phrase of Heraclitus a most beautiful harmony."

Now we should try to see whether there was anything which can be considered the common basis for all the philosophical deliberations and which may be recognized as a fixed principle running through them, pervading them through and through, like a string running through all the beads of a rosary. Any one who has had the privilege of getting acquainted with the vast mass

of Samskr̥t literature can, without much difficulty, satisfy himself on this head and find out for himself the existence of such a principle of life which has been finding expression from time to time, in various forms, in different periods of cultural and philosophical history of India. His honest literary labours will bring him the reward in the form of a deep conviction that there is such a principle and that it has been working as an under-current, behind all the activities of the Āryan mind from times immemorial and is still working in some way or other even under such changed conditions.