

"Indian Civilization and Culture"By: - M. K. Gandhi

The credit goes to Gandhi for simplifying Indian English, for loading every idea with spirituality and for fusing thought with feeling. It is Gandhi's Unified sensibility that can amalgamate disparate tendencies: politics and religion, art and science. Gandhi's prose is the prose of one who can write with as much ease and facility as any English writer. He discards Macaulayan English and starting a trend of writing—bare, simple and expressive prose.

The very opening lines of his (prose) essay reveal the comprehensiveness of his interests and the mastery with which he bring to bear them on the topic about which he is writing. Gandhi puts India in the world map as it were, and by highlighting the fact that when other civilizations have declined or metaphorised, India still remains fundamentally strong and vital. In spite of severe attack on Indian civilization and culture it remained standstill stable and unshaken. The writer shows its greatness with remarks that the general criticism against India and the Indians have been firmly attached with their civilization and culture. But the writer quickly move on to say that this charge is actually against a point of merit.

Mahatma Gandhi rightly defines 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. According to him:—

"To observe morality is to attain mastery over our minds and our passions."

A critic has rightly said: Morality is the same because it comes from God. Morality also bears the existing values of culture and civilization. And people of India can not be separated. So in this respect India has nothing to learn from others. Our ancestors have set a limit to our indulgences, perceiving that happiness was generally a condition of the mind. They wisely taught us the secret of good conduct by making us check our passions and abstain from pleasures. Because real happiness comes from mind and heart not from worldly things. Thus, we have been able to carry on our agriculture, generally speaking with the same plough and have been able to manage with the same kind of small houses made in earlier times. Gandhi is upto the mark in indicating the points of contrast between Indian civilization and that of the west when he points out: —

"The tendency of the Indian Civilization is to elevate the moral being, . . . . . The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God."

Gandhi emphatically asserts that it is urgent for every lover of India to hold on tightly to the ancient Indian civilization as a child clings to

the mother's breast. This beautiful image of the child clinging to the mother's breast is indeed very powerful and evocative. The writer goes on to add and justifies his actions when he observes that he is no hater of the west. He is grateful to the west for many things that he has learnt from its literature. But he is also thankful to modern civilization for making him realize that if he wants India to rise to its fullest height he has to tell his people that the lesson he has learnt from his experiments with the west is that it should be shunned. According to him, modern civilization is actually nothing but a worship of the material. The distinguishing characteristics of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of human wants. So, it is hedonist.

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." 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. The writer admits that some of the glittering results of modern inventions may appear to be too tempting. But man can be victorious only, if he can resist such a temptation. A man must arrange his physical and

cultural circumstances so that they do not hinder him in his service of humanity in which all his energies should be concentrated.

Thus the essay ends on a very positive, practical and humanitarian note. The satisfaction of one's physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one's narrow self, must meet at certain point a dead stop, before it degenerates into physical and intellectual volup tuousness. Finally, Gandhi aptly warns us against the evils of massive industrialization. The strength his language is bare, honest and straight forward expressions that establish direct communication with the readers, that is the matter of conviction and confidence.

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