Indian Culture-salient features, Challenges & Possibilities

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What is Culture?

• Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values and social forms which are passed on from one generation to another in any given society

• Unesco Chronicle

Material  \rightarrow Mental  \rightarrow World View
Facets of Mental Culture

• Multiple facets: Politics, economics, arts (music, poetry, painting..), physical sciences, religion, philosophy, spiritual science and technology

• Unique Contribution in the field of Spiritual Science and Technology
  – with stability achieved at the material and social level, their mental life began to experience deep stirrings and questionings
  – Thus emerged so many systems of philosophy
Concept of Spiritual Culture

- Its ideal in the words of Dr S. Radhakrishnan
  - The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit, who attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India’s pride that she has clung fast to this ideal and produced in every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of the rsis of the Upanisads and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully to realize this ideal.
Concept of Spiritual Culture

• Swami Ranganathananda:

The ultimate reality of man and the universe is spiritual through and through, that it is one and non-dual, that it can be realized by man, that this realization is the goal of human life, and that this goal can be reached through different paths.....

→ Mother and father give man only a physical birth, but the teacher gives him the real birth, namely mental and spiritual birth. That is why every child has a double birth, genetic and spiritual. That is the meaning of the word dvija.
By inner penetration, meditation helps man to leave behind the body, the senses, the ego, and all other non-self elements which, being nature’s products, are subject to time, and perishable. He thus realizes the Truth.
Concept of Spiritual Culture

• *This is the only way Monks, for the purification of beings, for overcoming of sorrow and lamentation….for the direct experience of Nibbana: that is the fourfold establishing of awareness.*

• *…observing body within the body,…observing sensations within the sensations, ..observing mind within the mind,….observing mental contents within mental contents*
Salient Features

• Rationality, non dogmatism:

  even as the wise would test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it on a piece of touchstone so are you to accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard for me

• Universality, Eternal principles, Sanatan Dharma
  – Impersonal foundation
  – You have to strive yourself, the Enlightened One’s only show the way
  – Eschew all evils, cultivate merits, purify the mind; this is what all Buddhas instruct
Salient Features

• *Sanatan Dharma*: The Universal laws applicable to the subjective world of Man
  – *matrasparshasto kaunteya shitousha sukhdukhada; aagama payino anitya...*
  – *dukheshu anudvignamana sukheshu vigataaspraha, viitaraaga bhay krodha...*
  – *na hi verena verani samantidhi kudachana, averena hi sammanti, esha dhammo sanantano*

• Spiritual equality and unity of all
  – *Each soul is potentially divine...*
Salient Features

• Emancipation is the outcome of perfect purity of mind; the impurities of mind are the roots of all evil

• Every human being can work towards purification of his mind: no distinction of caste, creed, sex, race, ……..

by birth is not one an outcaste, by birth is not one a brahmin; by deeds is one an outcaste, by deeds one a brahmin
Salient Features

• Tolerance and Universal Acceptance
  – ekam sat vipra bahuda vadanti
  – aa no bhadra kratavo yantu vaa..
  • The people of Calicut are infidels; consequently I consider myself in an enemy’s country...YetI admit that I meet with perfect toleration, and even favour. (Abdul Razak, envoy from Persia in Vijaynagara empire, 15 Century)

• Humanism
  – chalat bikhhive caarrikm, bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya, lokaaya anukampayaa
Equal respect for all sects

“Truly, if a person extols his own sect and disparages other sects with a view to glorifying his sect owing merely to his attachment to it, he injures his own sect very severely by acting in that way. Therefore, restraint in regard to speech is commendable, because people should learn and respect the fundamentals of one another’s Dharma.”

Ashoka R.E. XII
Challenges

• Forgetting the Essence of our glorious tradition resulting in
  – embracing crass materialism, dehumanization
  – vested political interests
  – breakdown of civil administration
  – erosion of ethical and moral values
  – dogmatism, bigotry, internecine and intra-religious conflicts, fragmentation of society, lack of tolerance
Responding to these?

- Creating an awareness in the society: Role of Education System
- Interfaith dialogues
  - Thich Nhat Hahn Model
- Reconciliation: handling historical memories
  - South African model
- Accepting the fact that non-indigenous faiths also now belong to India and respecting these as equally valid paths of spiritual pursuit
Creating an awareness in Society

• The difference between the “outer sheath” and the “core” teachings of all religions

• Core teachings are Universal Laws of Nature for the subjective world of Man.

• If one speaks or acts with an evil thought, sorrow follows him as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught ox. If one speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him as the shadow never apart.

• A sound tree can not bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire.
Creating an awareness in Society

• Requite evil with good, and he between whom and you is enmity, will become your dearest friend

• These core teachings are the real fundamentals of all religions, and not what the so-called “fundamentalists” profess.

• A proper dissemination of these ideas could dispel hatred--a precondition for curing the “disease” of ‘religious strife’ bedeviling the world today

• Education in Human Values
Interfaith Dialogues

• Organizing such dialogues (not discussions) between different groups in an atmosphere of empathic listening

• Thich Nhat Hahn
  – “When a person spoke, they refrained from using words of blame, hatred, and condemnation. They spoke in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Out of these dialogues the participating Palestinians and Israelis were very moved to realize that both sides suffer from fear.”
Reconciliation

• Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa: sublimation of memories of past injustices
  • recognise all aspects like ethos & code of conduct of the age of historical event
  • refrain from judging past conduct by present standards
  • Understand the feeling of hurt of successors of those who suffered damage & to persuade the successors of injurors to express regret
  • avoid glorifying the acts which caused hurt in the past
  • effect reconciliation through mutual give and take in consonance with present ethos (HSHT Hyderabad)
Accepting ‘Others’

- Our tradition emphasizes on Non duality
- Christianity came to India in 52AD
- Islam in 8th Century AD
- Core teachings of all religions are the same
- Emphasize, bring out these commonalities to promote harmony; respect diversity as law of nature
Possibilities

• Science - Spirituality confluence promoting appreciation of Indian thoughts
• Non duality, Interconnectedness & deep ecology
• Acceptance of Indian Philosophy of Healthcare (Naturopathy, Ayurveda & other ISM, Yogasanas...)
• Increasing acceptance of Meditation Techniques