

# VIVEKANANDA ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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**Abstract:** Culture and civilization are two columns of a nation for its unique identity in the world. Without cultural identity no nations can survive comprehensively. Sometimes cultural identity is destroyed by the influence of other culture. In India so many times our cultural property was destroyed by others and the deep root of it helps to come out from danger by scholars. Swami Vivekananda offering an interpretation of culture and civilization from different angle again contributes significantly for the resurgence of Indian culture and civilization. With his vast knowledge Vivekananda explains these two key factors of sociology from the basis of his objective historical studies. In this connection it can be mentioned that to Vivekananda historical studies are the studies of the history of mankind as a whole. In holistic approach the objectivity of the studies of history has lost its objective importance. With the help of this historical approach, i.e. objective approach of historical studies Vivekananda shows the possibility of the transformation of culture and civilization from the lower layer to the higher layer, from the materialistic world to the world of spirit.

**Keywords:** Resurgence, Spiritualization, Civilization, Basudhaiva Kutumbakam, Cardinal virtues,

**Introduction:** Swami Vivekananda is one of the pioneering models to offer fresh air to the make society to free the human society from the bondage of superstitions, from the bondage of ignorance and from the fear of identity crisis. His mission was to build a new India by resurging all the aspects of Indian society. Transformation of Indian Culture and society is one of the important parts of his mission. In this short paper I shall dwell upon this subject following Swami Vivekananda.

Culture and civilization are two important and comprehensive terms used in social philosophy. Culture is, in the words of Mathew Arnold, 'An impulse towards action, help, and beneficence, a desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it...it has its origin in the love of perfection. It is a study of perfection. It moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.'<sup>1</sup>

But Swami Vivekananda offers an interpretation from different angle. With his vast knowledge Vivekananda explains these two key factors (i.e. scientific passion; and moral and social passion) from the basis of his objective historical studies. In this connection it can be mentioned that to

Vivekananda historical studies are the studies of the history of mankind as a whole. In holistic approach the objectivity of the studies of history has lost its objective importance. With the help of this historical approach i.e. objective approach of historical studies Vivekananda shows the possibility of the transformation of culture and civilization from the lower layer to the higher layer, from the materialistic world to the world of spirit to establish world peace.

Culture is nothing but a spiritual phenomena- this is preached by the great Saynnyasin. To Vivekananda, 'This universe is simply a gymnasium in which the soul is taking exercise'<sup>2</sup> All human being has his own culture and he or she is always trying to manifest their inner world by this essential qualities. But He does not believe in the traditional explanation of cultural status or He does not take it as the indicator of material prosperities. Rather to him, culture is a process of spiritualization of human being. People are getting more and more spiritual flavour with the help of their culture and are driving their force towards the reality of world peace.

'The word resurgence' indicates a situation where a thing or a system get the chance to revive from its static position to a dynamic one keeping intact all the past treasures in it. In a word, resurgence does not refer to the repetition of the past only, or revival of the old without any addition or alteration. It means to spring up a new one with the help of the old. Old will not be rejected, but be accepted and be remodeled to fit with the new motion of the world.

The history of the nineteenth century is not pregnant only with the political incidents. Reform movements for Indian culture and civilization were also there to bring dynamic flavour in Indian history. When Swami Vivekananda was born in 1863, India was under the British rule and was forced to become a country without hope. In this time India had lost not only its political identity, but cultural identity was also vanished. This ancient and pious land was diverted to the technological and material advancement of the west without taking into account the wealth of our nation. All the enlightened people were interested to jump into the ocean of material prosperity losing or ignoring their Upanishadic or Vaidantic culture. A serious and misleading cultural confusion was there without having the power to lead the society in its right path. Ideological conflict was appeared to make the people confused. On the one hand the purity of religion was there to be followed by the people and the advancement of science also was there with colourful gifts for sophistication. Reason began to spread its wings over faith, but faith also there to beat reason. The concept of Theism and atheism were there to confuse the public. The debate between secularism and spirituality also was there to play guiding role. Ancient values were there in the blood of Indian people, but modern values were occupying the place. Which way to turn was the

main question. That was the chaotic situation. People were totally confused, totally vexed without having the proper guidance from any corner of the society

Swami Vivekananda offers a vivid and real picture of the then people of our country According to him , ‘A conglomeration of three hundred million souls, resembling men only in appearance, crushed out of life by being down-trodden by their own people and foreign nations, by people professing their own religion and by others of foreign faiths; patient in labour and suffering and devoid of any initiative like the slave; without any hope, without any past, without any future; desirous only of maintaining the present life anyhow, however precarious. . . . This is the picture concerning us, which naturally presents itself to the English official!<sup>3</sup>

This chaotic situation and the glimpse of the mounting success of science and technology forced the people to forget their glorious past , the rich culture, the Indian identity. Most of the educated people were interested or attracted to have a European culture to lead a sophisticated English or European model life . Gradually the nation transformed into a culturally handicapped nation losing its own original identity . Imitation of European or Western culture covers the peripheral area of the society with a glossy cover . But the inner world of the society remained as empty as drum. This sorry state of culture forced the Indian people to suffer from identity crisis.

On the other hand Vivekananda had his own idea about western attitude towards Indian culture. The West has claimed cultural superiority over all other nations. When and by whom were the seeds of superstitions pertaining to ‘cultural superiority’ of the West sown? Some of our contemporary thinkers have given serious thought to the genesis of this myth of the West’s ‘cultural superiority’. J. J. Clarke, in his book, *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient*, has traced it to Hegel and he refers to this myth of West’s claims of superiority over all others, as well as the belief of religious superiority which has been persisting for a long time. Clarke says: A second influential myth is the belief that ‘our’ religion, Christianity (we tend to ignore its Asian origins), represents a unique vehicle of divine revelation and hence is superior to all religions. The ‘scandal of particularity’, as it is sometimes called, is certainly not unique to Christianity, but it has undoubtedly played an important role in the shaping of our attitudes to non-Christian and non-European cultures. The cumulative effect of such myths is set on our mental noses a pair of spectacles through which we see our culture as something both essentially different from and inherently superior to others.<sup>4</sup> Swami Vivekananda, whose secular and spiritual personality was molded by Eastern divinity and Western rationalism, gave the lie, as early as a century ago, to the myth that any one culture or religion could be superior to the other.

In this critical juncture the appearance of Swami Vivekananda brings a light of hope to the heart of the common people of our country. He begins a radical and comprehensive reform movement to transform the culture and civilization from the begging land to the garaging land, from the material world to the spiritual world. This movement is designated by the thinkers as the Ramakrishna-Vivekanandan Ideological movement. All the ideals of Vivekananda were nourished and flourished by his Guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev and he appeared like a spiritual bomb to the material world to break the encircling dogma to pave the way to the spiritual world. His mission was to revive the culture and the civilization of India not through the destruction or rejection of the Western culture, but through the process of union of the both so that we can get a more glorious and rich culture and civilization than the past.

It should be kept in mind that Swami Vivekananda was not the pioneer of the reform movement in India. Before him in Madras and in Bengal also reform movements were there to offer better fruits to the people. In Madras Ranade was the leader to lead the reform movement and in Bengal Bramhasamaj was in the leading position.

But Swamiji had his own mission and vision regarding the revival of culture and civilization of this country. He criticized all the above said reform movements as by nature they were weak and were bound to be a member of the unsuccessful club. All the reformers of this time were either guided by the Christian Missionaries or by the elitist ego. There were no room for the masses. They all remained unaffected and confused. So called reformers had no time or any intention to provide space for the general people. Besides this dualistic attitude of the so-called leaders also one of the important causes of the failure of the reform movements of Bengal and Madras.

Above all the reform movements were baseless as they were trying to get resource only from Europe or the West ignoring the rich and value based culture of their own country. This may be designated as imported theory of culture. The failure of imported theory was inevitable. To fit the imported culture in our society was impossible. The people of our country became frustrated seeing the dance of skeleton of culture which was imposed by a limited class of our large society. The shovenistic attitude was deliberately rejected by the general people of our country, as they were not ready to accept it as their own. People looked for the resurgence of culture and civilization not from the outside sources but from the inner source. So all the movements started before Vivekananda were became fruitless and insignificant.

After the failure of the process of westernization of the Indian culture and civilization

Indian society and people were awaiting eagerly for a new light. This desired and long cherished light appeared with the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda reform movement. Vivekananda, a true patriot became the icon of the resurgence movement of Indian culture and civilization by fighting against the westernization process on the one hand and by resurging our own culture and civilization on the other hand.

It should be kept in mind that Swami Vivekananda does not reject the material prosperity of western culture; rather he thinks that it is also an important aspect of culture. But his intention is to show the importance of its spiritual aspect. Generally we think that material prosperity is the highest prosperity and it is secured. But to Vivekananda, without spiritualization of man, it cannot be secured.

What is the utility of the process of the spiritualization of man? To answer this question, Swamiji says that spiritualization of man helps a man to be aware of his own strength. According to Swamiji, “All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. Know that there is no darkness around us. Take the hands away and there is the light which is from the beginning”<sup>5</sup>

From this saying we can say that we have infinite strength and potentiality in our inner world. But we are not aware of this strength. That is why we underestimate ourselves and at the same time accept the material aspect of the culture as if there is no alternative. But we have to realize our strength with the help of spiritualization. This realization will drive us to manifest our inner and undiscovered infinite power in creative activities which brings the material prosperity and cultural achievements of various types. In a nutshell, it will show the path of the transformation of the present culture from material prosperity to the spiritual unity.

The cultures of the East and the West went on taking deeper roots in the consciousness of the Swami, as days passed. His exposure to the Western intellectual world, though initiated by his interest in its philosophical lore, led him to acquire erudition in the fields of art, architecture and allied components of Western culture. And, as an itinerant monk he got a direct knowledge of the diverse facets of Indian culture. His visit to the West and his long stay there opened new vistas of possibilities to bring about a fusion of the best elements of Eastern and Western cultural values.

He says: First, we have to understand that there are not any good qualities which are the privileged monopoly of one nation only. Of course, as with individuals, so with nations, there may be a prevalence of certain good qualities, more or less in one nation than in another. With us, the prominent idea is Mukti; with the Westerners, it is Dharma. . . . Here the word ‘Dharma’ is used

in the sense of the Mimāṃsakas. What is Dharma? Dharma is that which makes man seek for happiness in this world or the next. Dharma is established on work; Dharma is impelling man day and night to run after and work for happiness.<sup>6</sup>

According to Vivekananda, “the conception of highest culture is to be found in the conception of Brahmin-hood”.<sup>7</sup> He again says. “Brahmin-hood is the solution of the varying degrees of progress and culture as well as that of social and political problems”.<sup>8</sup>

Who is a Brahmin? In our society, the quality of Brahmin-hood is gifted by the forefathers. It is a paternal quality. A person came of a brahmin family is called brahman. But Swamiji does not believe in this way. To him everyone has the right to be a brahmin by manifesting his or her inner qualities. Everyone has the right to raise himself or herself up to the highest ideal. He again says, ‘If the brahmin is he who has killed all selfishness and who likes and works to acquire and propagate wisdom and power of love-if a country is altogether inhabited by such brahmins, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think that that country is above and beyond all laws, what police, what military are necessary to govern them? Why should anyone govern them at all?’<sup>9</sup>

So it is the culture, the spiritual progress of man which helps to manifest the divinity of man to have the highest quality. If this highest quality is attained by all inhabitants of a society, it will be in the real path for the real progress. He says, ‘No amount of force or government or legislative cruelty will change the condition of race, but it is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better.’<sup>10</sup>

Further he says, ‘It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. .... Knowledge is only skin deep, as civilization is, and a little scratch brings out the old savage.’<sup>11</sup>

During his extensive travels in India Swami Vivekananda had acquired an intimate knowledge not only of the socioeconomic conditions of his countrymen but of the spiritual and cultural values they had cherished for thousands of years. Likewise during his stay and tour of the United States of America and his sojourn in the United Kingdom for over four years, the Swami assiduously studied the spiritual and cultural values that guided the lives of the people of those countries. Moreover, the swami had, by birth, imbibed the collective cultural and spiritual consciousness of India.

So, with a vast and comprehensive knowledge he shows the real path of the transformation of Indian culture and civilization to be more glorious than ever the country had. According to Vivekananda the universal religion is the only way to reach the goal. His aim was to show the possibility of the convergence of Indian and Western culture to revive the static Indian culture and

to offer security to the Western culture.

He says that religion is a form a life. A true religious man must have a head to think, a heart to feel and hands to work. In other words, a religious man should have a vision of unity among the diversities, feeling of love and compassion for other. Cardinal values like unity, tolerance, compassion, and love etc. must be inculcated in this life.

Swamiji thinks of the possibility of bringing together all religions of the world under one umbrella. The dream of Vivekananda was to propagate universal religion which must be the spiritual synthesis. For him, the vedantic Since he was a rationalist, he was emphasizing on the glorified universe with peace and harmony so that the apparent contradictions and fictitious differences among the religions must vanish and the present state of the culture and civilization may get the space for transformation.

Practical Vedanta will teach man that he is no more the citizen of a particular country with geographical territory, rather he is a member of world community (Basudhaiva Kutumbakam) or he belongs to a greater humanity. This feeling of greater humanity is the manifestation of the highest culture of Swamiji's vision.

What is the nature of religion? You must bear in mind that religion does not consist in talk or doctrine or books, but in realization; it is not learning, but being'<sup>12</sup> It is our culture to have a faith in true religion, to have proper realization, to be a true learner so that the process of spiritualization be inspired.

In this sense that India understood religion; and it is this idea of religion that Swami Vivekananda expounded in the west and East through his powerful voice. The end and aim of religion, as our ancient teachers put it, is the experience, anubhava of God, through the steady growth in man's spiritual awareness. That is the touchstone of religion. There is such a thing as the spiritual growth of the individual, step by step. We experience this growth, just as we see a plant growing, or a building rising up step by step, brick by brick.

When we live the life of religion, strength comes to us, consciousness becomes expanded, sympathies grow and widen, and we feel that we are growing into better men and women. A religious man alone has the strength and wisdom to convert the chaos of life into a pattern of peace and happiness and general welfare. If religion is taken away from human society what will remain? It is simple barbarism. And today this barbarism in religions rules this society. We have to fight against this barbarism with a strong and powerful weapon. This weapon is nothing but the concept of Universal religion of Swami Vivekananda or the science of values.

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What does religion do for society? Swamiji Says, "It brings to man eternal life. It has made man what he is and will make of this human animal of God. That is what religion can do. Take religion from human society and what will remain? Nothing but a forest of brutes. Sense-happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom, jñāna, is the goal of human life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So the highest wisdom must be the spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge bliss will come."<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of the ninetieth century it was feared that religion was at an end. Under the tremendous sledge hammer blows of scientific research old superstitions were crumbling away like masses of porcelain. Science, through its technology, may build for man a first class house, and equals it with radio, television, and other gadgets; the social security measures of a modern welfare state may provide him with everything necessary for a happy fulfilled life in this world, yet none of these can ensure, by themselves, that man will live in his house in peace or happiness.

Today the picture of healthy environment has become a gloomy one. Man in this technological civilization feels inwardly impoverished and empathy in an environment of wealth, power, and pleasure; he is full of tension and sorrow, doubt and uncertainty, all the time. Juvenile delinquency, drunkenness, suicide and an increasing variety of other maladies are gradually increasing.<sup>14</sup>

Total fulfillment cannot be achieved with these equipments. If man wants to create a



healthy external environment, he must have to enrich his internal environment. And if he wants to enrich his internal environment he should be, he must be a religious man, a true follower of the central theme of the universal religion of Swami Vivekananda

Human being acquired technological knowledge with the help of science. In spite of his rudimentary self-knowledge which gave him a measure to control of the animal and natural world. A little more of this self-knowledge, gained through reflection in the context of social experience, helped to increase his control over himself and to humanize him. This process, ever in operation in human cultures and civilizations and sociopolitical organizations, has led up to the man of the modern age, with his almost total control over the not-self environment through an efficient technology, with his global sweep in socio-cultural interests and contacts, and with his yearning for the universal and human.

Yet, the disparity between his knowledge of his self and control over his inner nature, on the one hand, and his knowledge of and control over the external nature, on the other, between, in short, his moral efficiency and his technical efficiency, confronts him with the most serious problem that his evolution has so far seriously posed. This is thwarting his urges and efforts to achieve fulfillment. Neglected and unsolved, this problem may as well make him the only possible destroyer of his civilization, of the fruits of evolution, and of his species as well. In the meantime, he is destined to move from one tension to another, from one sorrow to another and from un-fulfillment to another.

Conclusion: The only solution lies in the deepening and strengthening of his moral and spiritual awareness. Biological evolution achieved a measure of this in the life of earliest man in his rudimentary knowledge of his own self. We have to transform our knowledge to wisdom.

I think that the concept of universal religion of Swami Vivekananda is nothing but the science of values. With the concept we will be able to present a character development theme. It is presented by Swami Vivekananda taking from the core idea of Vedanta. For the future evolution of human being values are needed. The science of values is equal to Dharma. And 'Do not do unto others what is against your own interest' is the main theme of Dharma. The Universal religion or Dharma or the science of values consists of ethical, moral and humanistic attitudes and actions and that dharma is primary at the human level, without which no ordered society can exist.

We all know that there are four Purusarthas in Indian Ethics that includes everything. The four Purusarthas are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa. There is a science in the enumeration. Dharma will guide artha and kama to reach at moksa, that is perpetual bliss that is our culture.

But in actual life we are not ready to follow this scientific classification of Purusarthas, rather kama and artha are liked by all in our society ignoring the first and the last one. That is why all the miseries are there in our society. Ignoring the traditional enumeration we all are trying to follow the wrong path.

The concept of Dharma is designated as the science of values. Dharma teaches us how to live in society, how to related yourselves with others. It says that all persons have to live with others relating to himself. Other persons should not be ignored. All persons have the same value, as they all have the divinity in themselves. It says that no stable society can exist without dharma, without the operation of ethical and moral values i.e. highest culture; such as love, truthfulness, compassion, incorruptibility, service, capacity and team work, mutual helpfulness and inner peace.<sup>15</sup>

These values are called divine wealth and in the *Gītā* we find a series of divine wealth expressed there in Chapter 16.

‘ Abhayaṁ Sattvasmīṣ’uddhiḥ jñānāyoga vyavasthitiḥ ;

Dānaṁ damaśca yajñas’ca svādhyāyastapa ārjavam .’<sup>16</sup>

Fearlessness, purity of mind, establishing oneself in the yoga of knowledge; charity, control, of the senses, sacrifice, study, austerity, uprightness.

‘ Ahimsā Satyamakrodhaḥ tyāgaḥ Sāntirāpāis’unam;

Dayā bhūtesvaloluptvaṁ mārdaṁ hrīracāpalam .’<sup>17</sup>

Non injury, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquility, absence of calumny, compassion to beings, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness.

‘ Tejaḥ Kṣamā dhṛtiḥ s’aucam adroho nātmānitā ;

Bhavanti Sampadaṁ daivīmabhijātasya bhārata .’<sup>18</sup>

Boldness, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride, these (values) belong to one from for the divine state, O descendent of Bhārata .

Swamiji’s concept of the transformation of culture and civilization is based on the idea of Universal religion which is pregnant with cardinal virtues or the divine wealth stated in the *Gita* and we all have to inculcate all the virtues to be a man of the healthy society, a stable society. All these are not only theoretical, but also practical. It is culture which brings the possibility of the application of all these virtues in our daily life to manifest ourselves as the member of the long

cherished world of grater humanity. It is the high time to assimilate them, to apply them in every action, in every aspect of life. Let us jump into the world of peace with fully charged, with the antivirus of the highest culture i e. a unique form of culture having spirituality as the basis and material prosperity as its manifestation offered by Swamiji. With the transformed culture and civilization presented by our great Swamiji, the possibility of the real union of East and West will come into existence.

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