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CHAPTER

The Heritage of India

A. L. Basham

➔ About the Author

A. L. Basham, a distinguished British historian and scholar, visited India in September 1985. He had a deep understanding of human life and Indian Culture. He died of cancer in Calcutta on January 27, 1986. *'The Wonder that was India'* is his famous book. The present extract, *'The Heritage of India'* has been selected from this book.



➔ About the Lesson

A. L. Basham has emphasised some important elements of Indian Culture. In the past, the Indian Culture had to bear the clash of many other cultures. But the Indian Culture showed its vigour by adopting and digesting the various elements of foreign cultures. Although western ideas are having great impact on Indian Society, yet fundamental element of Hindu Culture did not change the Upanishads and The Gita. People have a fascination for the **Mahabharat** and the **Ramayan**. The love story of Dushyant and Shakuntala and also of **Pururavas** and **Urvashi** are as popular today as these were hundreds of years ago. There are many other examples which can be cited to prove that there is still the continuity of Indian Culture.



Ram Mohan Roy had sounded the theme with his passionate advocacy of social reform; Vivekananda repeated it with a more nationalist timbre, when he declared that the highest form of service of the Great Mother was social service. Other great Indians, chief of whom was Mahatma Gandhi, developed the theme of social service as a religious duty, and the development continues under Gandhi's successors.

Mahatma Gandhi was looked on by many, both Indian and European, as the epitome of Hindu tradition, but this is a false judgement for he was much influenced by Western ideas. Gandhi believed in the fundamentals of his ancient culture, but his passionate love of the underdog and his antipathy to caste, though not unprecedented in ancient India, were unorthodox in the extreme, and owed more to European 19th century liberalism than to anything Indian. His faith in non-violence was, as we have seen, by no means typical of Hinduism-his predecessor in revolt, the able Maratha Brahman B.G.

Tilak, and Gandhi's impatient lieutenant Subhas Chandra Bose, were far more orthodox in this respect. For Gandhi's pacifism, we must look to the 'Sermon on the Mount' and to Tolstoy. His championing of women's right is also the result of Western influence. In his social context, he was always rather an innovator than a conservative. Though some of his colleagues thought his programme of limited social reform too slow, he succeeded in shifting the whole emphasis of Hindu thought towards a popular and equalitarian social order, in place of the hierarchy of class and caste. Following up the work of many less well-known 19th century reformers, Gandhi and his followers of the Indian National Congress have given new orientation and new life to Hindu culture, after centuries of stagnation.

Today there are few Indians, whatever their creed, who do not look back with pride on their ancient culture, and there are few intelligent Indians who are not willing to sacrifice some of its effect elements so that India may develop and progress. Politically and economically, India faces many problems of great difficulty, and no one can forecast her future with any certainty. But it is safe to predict that, whatever the future may be, the Indians of coming generations will not be unconvincing and self-conscious copies of Europeans, but will be men rooted in their traditions, and aware of the continuity of their culture. Already, after only seven years of Independence, the extremes of national self-denigration and fanatical cultural chauvinism are disappearing. We believe that Hindu civilization is in the act of performing its most spectacular feat of synthesis. In the past it has received, adapted and digested elements of many different cultures- Indo-European, Mesopotamian, Iranian, Greek, Roman, Scythian, Turkish, Persian and Arab. With each new influence, it has somewhat changed. Now, it is well on the way to assimilating the culture of the West.

Hindu civilization will, we believe, retain its continuity. The *Bhagwad Gita* will not cease to inspire men of action, and the *Upanishads*, men of thought. The charm and graciousness of the Indian way of life will continue, however much affected it may be by the labour-saving devices of the West. People will still love the tales of the heroes of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and of the loves of Dushyanta and Shakuntala and Pururavas and Urvasi. The quiet and gentle happiness which has at all times pervaded Indian life where oppression, disease and poverty have not overclouded it, will surely not vanish before the more hectic ways of the West.

Much that was useless in ancient Indian culture, has already perished. The extravagant and barbarous hecatombs of the Vedic age have long since been forgotten, though animal sacrifice continues in some sects. Widows have long ceased to be burnt on their husband's pyres. Girls may not by law be married in childhood. In buses and trains all over India, Brahmans rub shoulders with the lowest castes without consciousness of grave pollution, and the temples are open to all by law. Caste is vanishing; the process began long ago, but its pace is now so rapid that the more objectionable features of caste may have disappeared within a generation or so. The old family system is adapting itself to present-day conditions. In fact, the whole face of India is altering, but the cultural tradition continues, and it will never be lost.

||Glossary||

heritage	— that which has been or may be inherited (विरासत)
Ram Mohan Roy	— a great social reformer of Bengal who opposed the Sati System (सती प्रथा का विरोध करने वाले बंगाल के महान समाज सुधारक)
theme	— subject (विषय)
passionate advocacy	— strong support (दृढ़ समर्थन)
Vivekanand	— a great nationalist saint who founded the Ram Krishna Mission (महान राष्ट्रवादी सन्त जिन्होंने रामकृष्ण मिशन की स्थापना की)
timbre	— tone (लय, स्वर, ध्वनि)
epitome	— symbol (प्रतीक)
tradition	— custom (परम्परा)
influenced	— impressed (प्रभावित)
underdog	— victim of social and political injustice (सामाजिक और राजनीतिक अन्याय के शिकार शोषित वर्ग)
antipathy	— strong dislike (घृणा)
unprecedented	— anything not done before (अभूतपूर्व)
unorthodox	— against the tradition (परम्परा के विरुद्ध)
extreme	— too much (पर्याप्त, अत्यधिक)
revolt	— revolution (क्रान्ति, विद्रोह)
Bal Gangadhar Tilak	— one of the greatest leader of India (भारत के एक महानतम नेता)
impatient	— without patience (धैर्यहीन)
Bose	— Subhash Chandra Bose
orthodox	— one who does not change (रूढ़िवादी)
pacifism	— principle that war must be abolished (शांतिवाद)
Tolstoy	— a famous novelist and story writer of Russia (रूस का एक प्रसिद्ध उपन्यासकार व कहानीकार)
innovator	— one who finds and practices new methods (प्रगतिवादी)
conservative	— orthodox (परिवर्तन विरोधी)
colleagues	— companions (सार्थी, सहयोगी)
shifting	— transferring (स्थानान्तरण)
equalitarian social order	— a social set up where equality is assured (समानता पर आधारित समाज व्यवस्था)

hierarchy	— the organisation of a system into higher or lower ranks (संस्तरण)
orientation	— direction (दिशा, झुकाव)
stagnation	— getting dull (सड़ने, निष्क्रियता, रूकावट)
creed	— religious belief (धार्मिक मत)
effete-elements	— weaknesses (कमजोरियाँ)
forecast	— foretell (भविष्यवाणी करना)
predict	— foretell (पूर्व घोषणा या भविष्यवाणी करना)
aware	— conscious (जागरूक)
extremes	— outermost (सबसे बाहरी)
fanatical cultural	— strong and foolish (सांस्कृतिक उत्कृष्टता के लिए दृढ़ व मूर्खतापूर्ण जुनून)
chauvinism	enthusiasm for cultural glory.
spectacular feat of synthesis	— wonderful ability to combine various elements. (विभिन्न तत्वों को परस्पर जोड़ने की अद्भुत क्षमता)
digested	— absorbed (पचा लिया, समाहित हो गए)
assimilating	— absorbing (समाविष्ट करना)
retain	— maintain (बनाए रखना)
charm	— beauty (सौन्दर्य)
graciousness	— splendour (भव्यता)
affected	— influenced (प्रभावित)
labour-saving devices	— means to save hard physical work (कठोर शारीरिक श्रम को बचाने के साधन)
pervaded	— full of (परिपूर्ण, व्याप्त)
oppression	— tyranny (अत्याचार)
vanish	— disappear (विलय होना, गायब होना)
hectic ways	— excited methods (उत्तेजित विधियाँ)
perished	— destroyed (विध्वंश करना, तोड़ना)
extravagant	— wasteful (फिजूलखर्ची)
barbarous	— uncivilized (असभ्य)
hecatomb	— great public sacrifice (सार्वजनिक बलि देने की प्रथा)
consciousness	— awareness (जागरूकता, चेतना)
pollution	— loss of purity (प्रदूषण)
process	— action (प्रक्रिया)
pace	— speed (गति)
altering	— changing (बदल रहा, परिवर्तित हो रहा)

|| Exercise ||

➤ Passages for Explanation :

Explain with reference to the context of the following passages :

- (a) Gandhi believed in the fundamentals.....anything Indian.
- (b) Politically.....their culture.
- (c) But it is safe to predict.....feat of synthesis.
- (d) Caste is vanishing.....be lost.
- (e) The quiet and gentle.....of the west.
- (f) Though some of class and caste.
- (g) Today there are.....with any certainty.
- (h) Ram Mohan Roy Gandhi is successors.
- (i) We believe that culture of the west.

➤ Short Answer Type Questions :

Answer the followings questions in not more than 30 words each :

- (i) What did Ram Mohan Roy advocate ?
- (ii) What according to Vivekanand, was the highest form of service of the 'Great Mother' ?
- (iii) What do you understand by 'social service as a religious duty' ?
- (iv) "Gandhiji was always rather an innovator than a conservative." How ?
- Or* What grounds does the writer give to prove that Gandhiji was much influenced by western ideas?
- (v) What does the author predict about the Indian way of life ?
- (vi) How will Hindu Civilization retain its continuity ?
- (vii) What contrast does the author see between the Indian way of life and that of the west ?
- (viii) What goes to prove that caste is disappearing fast in India?
- (ix) How is the old family system adapting itself to the present day needs ?
- (x) What is the speciality of Indian Culture?
- Or* What is unique about Indian culture?
- (xi) What do the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads do, according to A.L. Basham?
- (xii) What was Mahatma Gandhi's attitude towards Indian culture?
- (xiii) What does the heritage of India consist of?

➤ Vocabulary :

(a) *Give the Synonyms of the following words :*

(i) timbre, (ii) antipathy, (iii) vanish, (iv) pace, (v) creed, (vi) revolt, (vii) context, (viii) colleagues, (ix) emphasis, (x) predict.

(b) *Give the Antonyms of the following words :*

(i) antipathy, (ii) violence, (iii) progressive, (iv) low, (v) always, (vi) social, (vii) new, (viii) ancient, (ix) appearing, (x) more.

(c) *Fill in the blanks with suitable words given below :*

graciousness, continuity, ceased, useless.

(i) Hindu civilization will retain its

(ii) The charm and of the Indian way of life will continue.

(iii) Much that was in Indian Culture has already perished.

(iv) Widows have long..... to be burnt on their husband's pyres.

(d) *Below are some pairs of words. Use them in your own sentences to make out the difference in their meanings :*

(i) berth, birth, (ii) fair, fare, (iii) cast, caste, (iv) course, coarse, (v) principal, principle, (vi) timbre, timber.

(e) *Fill in the blanks in the following sentences, selecting the most suitable words from those given within the brackets.*

(i) Hindu civilization will continuity. (regain, refrain, retain, remain)

(ii) Much that was useless in ancient Indian culture has already

(lost, perished, destroyed, finished)

(iii) Widows have long to be burnt on their husbands' pyres.

(ceased, stopped, encouraged, inspired)

(iv) Hindu civilization will, we believe its continuity.

(lose, maintain, retain, destroy)

(v) Mahatma Gandhi believed in the of his Indian culture

(sorrows, hypocrisy, fundamentals, materialism)

(vi) Mahatma Gandhi was looked on by many as the of Hindu tradition.

(opponent, follower, epitome, patron)

(vii) The old family system is itself to present day conditions.

(adapting, opposing, suiting, competing)

(viii) The whole face of India is altering but the cultural tradition

(fades, perishes, discontinues, continues)

