

## THE UNITY OF INDIAN CULTURE

### Humayun Kabir

*Humayun Kabir was a famous poet, novelist, essayist and a renowned political thinker. He was a Cabinet Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs during Nehru's Primeminstership. An Oxford product, he had the proud privilege of being elected president of the Oxford University Student's Union. The present piece is an adapted version of Humayun Kabir's lecture delivered in Baroda University. The lecture focuses on the glorious past of India's culture and its rich heritage. It precisely reflects Kabir's love and faith in the greatness of his motherland.*

#### A. Work in small groups and discuss the following:

1. Have you ever found people of another community participating in your festival or vice versa? Narrate your experience.

## THE UNITY OF INDIAN CULTURE

Till recently, the Aryans were regarded as the earliest invaders of the land. It was thought that they came to a country which was uncivilised

and barbarian, but modern research has proved that there were invaders even before the Aryans poured into this land. They had evolved a civilization higher than that of the Aryan hordes who came in their wake. These Pre-Aryans had displaced still earlier people and built up new civilization which has astonished modern scholars by its extent and depth. The Aryan invasion repeated the process and led to fresh infusion of the old with the new. This continued with the successive inroads of fighting races who came to conquer but remained to lose themselves in the Indian racial cauldron. The Greek invaders were followed by Sakas and Huns and a hundred other nameless tribes. They all appeared on the scene as victors but were soon absorbed in the ranks of the vanquished.

Today, whatever is Indian, whether it be an idea, a word, a form of art, a political institution or a social custom, is a blend of many different strains and elements.

In spite of this derivation from many sources and the consequent variety of forms and types we find a remarkable unity of spirit informing Indian culture throughout the ages. In fact, it is this underlying unity which is one of the most remarkable features of Indian culture. In volume and duration no civilization (with the possible exception of the Chinese) can bear comparison with the civilization of India. The area of the land, the number of the people, the variety of the races and the length of the India's history are hardly repeated elsewhere. The vitality of Indian culture is equally amazing. In spite of a thousand vicissitudes, it has survived to the modern day. This has been possible only on account of a sense of Indianness which imposed unity on all diversity and wove into one fabric of national life the many strands of different texture, colour and quality which have entered here.

The ancient world threw up fine flowers of civilization in many lands. With the exception of India and China, they are all dead and gone.

It is only in India and to some extent in China that the old civilization and culture have grown and changed but never grown or changed at the expense of an underlying unity. This has been possible only through the capacity of readjustment exhibited by the Indian society.

**B.1.1 Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:**

1. The vitality of Indian culture is not amazing.
2. The ancient world threw up fine flowers of civilization in many lands.
3. The old civilization and culture have grown up and changed only in Japan.
4. The Aryans were regarded as the earliest invaders of the land.
5. Give the opposites of the following words:
  1. Modern .....
  2. Conquer .....
  3. Unity .....
  4. Possible .....
  5. Dead .....

**B.1.2. Answer the following questions briefly:**

1. Who has delivered the speech 'The Unity of Indian Culture'?
2. How were the Aryans regarded till recently?
3. How did the pre-Aryans build up a new civilization?
4. What, according to the author, is the most remarkable feature of Indian culture?
5. Where has old civilization and culture grown and changed?

One ground of this adjustment is found in the spirit of toleration that has characterised Indian history throughout the ages "Live and let live" has been the policy of the Indians in all spheres of life. Sometimes this has been carried so far that contrary, if not contradictory, attitudes have been allowed to survive simultaneously. Toleration had led to the sufferance, of civil and even indifference to the values of life. This however, is at worst the defect of a virtue. Such toleration is perhaps preferable to the fanatic devotion which leads to the denial and persecution of all other values but its own.

Throughout the changes of Indian history we therefore find a spirit of underlying unity which informs the diverse expressions of its life, but the unity was never a dead uniformity, a living unity never is.

Unity and universality must belong to any culture that is true and vital. Now culture is a concept which cannot be simply or unitarily defined. There is no single character or mark which can be regarded as the essence or distinctive feature of culture. It is always a complex of many strands of varying importance and vitality. If we attempt to differentiate between culture and civilization of life which makes civil society possible, culture, on the other hand, is the resultant of such organisation and expresses itself through language and art, through philosophy and religion, through social habits and customs and through political institutions and economic organisations. Not one of them is separately culture, but collectively they constitute the expression of life which we describe as culture. Culture is the efflorescence of civilization. Civilization is the organisation of society which creates the condition of culture. There can, therefore, be no culture without civilization, but there may be civilization which have not yet developed their culture. Perhaps what is more often the case is that there are civilised people among whom only a small section has achieved culture. We have, therefore, had and still have races and nations that are civilised;



but, except for India, we have not yet had any nation or race that could be regarded as cultured in all its sections and classes, for here in India, culture is almost as extensive as civilization.....

The experience of European countries gives us cases of civilization without culture. In India, on the other hand, even the casual tourist has observed that the difference between the masses and classes is not one of quality and can be explained in terms of information and opportunity. It is often otherwise in Europe. There the difference in quality between the masses and the classes is at times so great that it has shaken the faith of the most fervent of democrats.

The remarkable phenomenon can be explained only in terms of the unity and continuity of Indian culture. Unity is, in one sense, the common characteristic of all culture. What specially distinguishes the culture of India is its unbroken continuity. Here, there have been no violent or sudden breaks, but on the contrary, a steady growth and extension of culture which has gradually permeated every class and section of society.

**B.2.1. Answer the following questions briefly:**

1. What has been the policy of the Indians in all spheres of life?
2. What is preferable to fanatic devotion?
3. Which spirit underlies the changes of the Indian history?
4. How does Humayun Kabir define culture?
5. How does Humayun Kabir define civilization?
6. What does the experience of European countries give us?

## GLOSSARY AND NOTES

**invader** (n): one who attacks or enters (a country) so as to occupy.

**barbarian** (adj): rude, uncultured

**astonish** (v): to amaze, to surprise

**cauldron** (n): a large boiling vessel

**absorb** (v): to incorporate

**vicissitude** (n): variation, changes

**diversity** (n): unlikeness, variety

**toleration** (n): forbearance

**vanquish** (v): to defeat, to conquer

**fervent** (adj): warm, zealous

**fanatic** (adj): unreasonably enthusiastic in religion

## C.1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What, in your opinion, are the characteristic features of the Indian culture?
2. How is the Indian culture different from the cultures of other countries?
3. Explain clearly the difference between culture and civilization.
4. What is the capacity of readjustment exhibited in the Indian society? Is it the strength or the weakness of the Indian society?
5. Discuss the main ideas contained in the text.

## C.2. GROUP DISCUSSION

**Discuss the following in groups or pairs:**

1. Is the capacity of readjustment on wane in contemporary society?
2. Live and let others live.

**D. WORD STUDY**

**D.1. Correct the spelling of the following words:**

infuson	atitude	fervant
ecception	consept	voilent
lenght	teksture	socity

**D.2. Mark the following words taken from the lesson :**

tolerate	-	toleration
civilise	-	civilisation
infuse	-	infusion
organise	-	organisation

**Now, Make ten words using the suffix '-ion'**

**D.3. Find out from the lesson words the meanings of which have been given on the left hand side. The last part of each word is given on the right hand side:**

1. uncivilised ..... rian
2. large kettle ..... dron
3. structure ..... ture
4. twisted threads making a fabric ..... ands
5. blossoming of flowers ..... ences
6. tribes that keep moving  
from one place to another ..... rdes

**Ex. 2. Fill in the blanks with the words given below:**

amazing	civilization
remarkable	efflorescence      blend

1. The pre-Aryans built up a new .....
2. We find a ..... unity of spirit in the Indian culture.
3. The vitality of Indian culture is equally .....
4. Indian social custom is a ..... of many different strains and elements.
5. Culture is the ..... of civilization.

#### D.4. PHRASES

**Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used:**

a blend of                      on the other hand                      in fact  
 at times                      in spite of                      on the contrary

#### E. GRAMMAR

Active and Passive voice

**Ex. 1. Read the following sentences taken from the lesson carefully:**

1. The Aryans were regarded as the earliest invaders.
2. The length of India's history are hardly repeated elsewhere.

You see in these passive sentences, that the agent is not mentioned because the agent is either unknown or is too obvious. It is not a necessary piece of information.

**Note :** The agent (the preposition 'by' and its subject) is to be mentioned when the meaning of the sentence would otherwise not be clear; complete or understandable.

**Now look at the following sentences:**

1. In Patna, the traffic is controlled by the police.





- English is taught in our school by Mr. Sinha.

(In these sentences the agent is mentioned to supply necessary information)

**Ex. 1. Now change the following sentences into Passive Voice:**

- People loved Gandhiji.
- Police caught the thief red-handed.
- Thieves took away all the money.
- Someone stole my watch.
- People believe that the earth is round.

**Sentences with two objects**

**Ex. 2. Read the following sentences carefully:**

- I gave the boy a pen.
- Tom gave me money.

**Note :** When sentences with two objects in Active Voice are changed into their passive equivalents, either object may become the subject of the verb in the passive sentences. However, the direct object is usually preferred as the subject of the passive sentence.

So, the passive form of above two sentences will be as:

- The boy was given a pen by me.
- I was given money by Tom.

**The construction can be presented as follows:**

NP1 + V + NP2 + NP3

= NP2 + V passive + by + NP1 + NP3

= NP3 + V passive + by + NP1 + NP2

**Note:** NP = Noun Phrase

**Ex. 2.1. Now Change these sentences in Active Voice into Passive Voice:**

1. She teaches me English.
2. He gave me a book.
3. Mohan asked me several questions.
4. They offered me a good job.
5. I taught him Sanskrit.

**Ex. 3. Look at the sentences given below and then do the exercise that follows:**

- (i) I am to do it. (Active)  
It is to be done by me. (Passive)
- (ii) Sonu has to give me money. (Active)  
I have to be given money by Sonu (Passive)
- (iii) He was to help the poor. (Active)  
The poor were to be helped by him. (Passive)
- (iv) Ravi had to feed me. (Active)  
I had to be fed by Ravi (Passive)

**Ex. 3.1. Change into Passive :**

- (i). My teacher has to teach me.
- (ii) Robin had to buy a car.
- (iii) Vinayak was to close the door.
- (iv) My father is to plant the tree.
- (v) People have to save the forest.
- (vi) We have to help the blind.
- (vii) Kamal Kishore is to sing a song.

**Ex. 4. Now study the sentences given below and then do the exercise that follows :**

- (i) Who did it? (Active)  
By whom was it done? (Passive)
- (ii) When do you take milk? (Passive)  
When is milk taken by you? (Passive)
- (iii) Do you sing a song? (Active)  
Is a song sung by you? (Passive)
- (iv) Help me (Active)  
Let me be helped or I should be helped. (Passive)
- (v) Give me your book, please. (Active)  
You are requested to give me your book. (Passive)

**Ex. 4.1. Change into Passive Voice :**

- (i) Who helps the blind?  
(ii) Is he writing a story?  
(iii) Why do you want to do it?  
(iv) Did Rekha buy a car?  
(v) Close the door.  
(vi) Solve the problem, please.  
(vii) Post the letter.

**F. ACTIVITIES**

1. Collect a few folk songs which the people of your community sing on different festive occasions.
2. Write a short report on the preservation of the cultural heritage of your state.

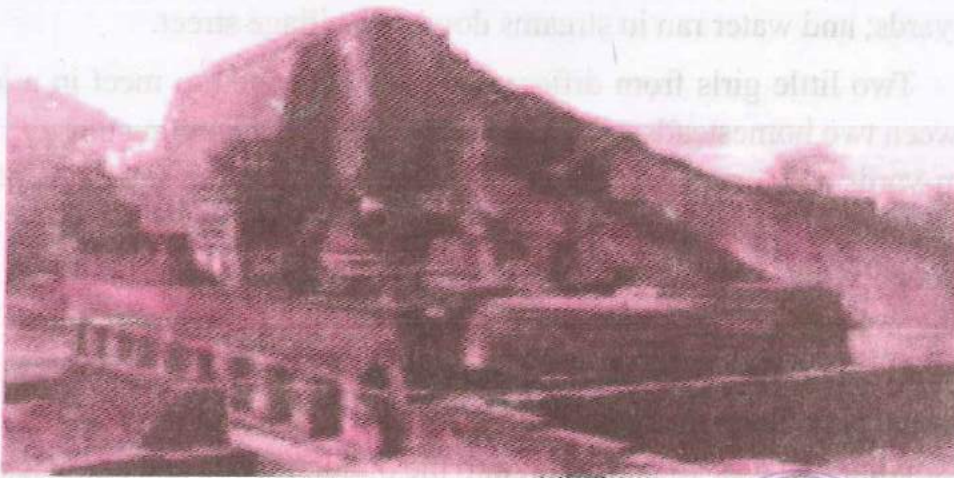
## G. TRANSLATION

**Translate the following passage from the lesson into Hindi:**

Culture is the efflorescence of civilisation. Civilisation is the organisation of society which creates the condition of culture. There can, therefore, be no culture without civilisation, but there may be civilisation which have not yet developed their culture. Perhaps what is more often the case is that there are civilised people among whom only a small section has achieved culture. We have, therefore, had and still have races and nations that are civilised; but, except for India, we have not yet had any nation or race that could be regarded as cultured in all its sections and classes, for here in India, culture is almost as extensive as civilisation.

## H. PICTURE COMPOSITION

**Work in pairs or in small groups:**



Look at the picture and write at least ten sentences about it.

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