INTRODUCTION

THE PROMPTINGS

1. Culture – Its meaning and Significance

Aristotle, the eminent Greek Philosopher, described man as an animal. But he added many adjectives like 'rational', 'political' and 'social', to the term animal, with a view to focusing the 'rational', 'political' and 'social' instincts in man and to differentiate him from the other living beings. These finer instincts have earned him the adjectives the "crest jewel", the "crown" of creation. Once again, it is these instincts that has placed him at the top rung in the ladder of evolution. Actually, unlike animals, man, by virtue of his possessing these instincts, has been able to live together with his fellow beings, enabling him to hold aloft the maxim, "United we stand, Divided we fall", and carve out a definite way of life, otherwise called culture, aiming at perfection in all spheres of life.

Powys aptly describes "culture as creative self sculpture". But today, this pursuit of perfection, in one's life remains an unrealised ideal. The Duke of Windsor, when he

1 As quoted by Prof. Gokak, N.K., in India and World Culture, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 1972, p.2.
was prince of Wales, is said to have posed a question "What is culture?" and answered "It is a fine idea, I wish man will be able to realize it some day".2

Culture is not acquired with the wave of a magic wand. Age is not the determinant of culture. Culture does not mean attachments to any idea or doctrine. For, attachment would lead to fanaticism. Culture is only interested in perfecting man. It begins with perfection of man, the reason being that perfection at the level of man leads to societal perfection. Viewed from this broader perspective, culture is a means to an end, the end being the well being of humanity.

2. Indian Culture - A Brief Analysis

a. Indian Culture-Survivor of reactions

Even culture is no exception to the Newtonian Law that for every action there is a reaction. Only when an action creates response and causes reaction, can there be progress. Otherwise there will be only stagnation, if not regression, Hegel endorses this Action-Reaction-Progression formula, by means of his triadic process while describing the movement of thought. Any culture in the process of evolution has to abide by

2 Ibid., p.2.
this principle. While the various cultures of the world could not survive this action-reaction momentum and eventually, succumbed to it, so much so, that they were coffined as 'dead culture', Indian Culture alone like the proverbial phonenix survived all these obstacles, only to come back with a double vigour, and live for ever like the legendary Mārkendeya, to earn the epithet "Living Culture".

b. The Genesis of Indian Culture

Tradition is the blood which runs through the veins of Indian Culture. Tradition is something what we have inherited from the past. In this transmission of tradition, a certain way of life has percolated down the ages in us and this is what comes to be known as culture. Culture, in other words, has been moulded by tradition. To quote Swami Renganathananda, "Culture is a cumulative effect of inherited tradition."  


C. Value - The determinants of Culture

On what is a culture based? What is it which distinguishes a living culture from a dead culture? The answer can be found in one word 'value'. If the value which a culture
cherished is everchanging and impermanent, then culture also which breathes that value becomes impermanent and hence dead. In that case, could it be said that Indian culture still survives because of its permanent unchanging value? The answer obviously is 'yes'. And that unchanging value, can be spiritual only.

d. Culture of India through the ages - A brief Analysis

Each man, in the course of his life's journey from the womb to the tomb, encounters many challenges, physical, mental, intellectual and otherwise. In this epic struggle only those who are fit to face them survive while others die. The same is true of culture also. Longer the duration of a culture greater and varied their challenges and harder it becomes for survival. Indian culture is no exception to this rule. Consequently, it has faced many challenges of varied denominations. In spite of these challenges if it could survive, it is only by virtue of its deep commitment to the basic value viz., spiritualism. In this context, as a point of illustration, a bird's eye view of the challenges becomes necessary.

e. The shocks and the shock - absorbers

Indian culture is said to have had its origin in the vedas whose date is fixed as 4000 B.C.\(^4\) It is well known that

\(^4\) Raju, P.T., India's Culture and her Problems, The University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 1947, pp.4-6.
the vedic people were worshippers of nature. This worship of the various forms of nature as Gods technically termed polytheism, got developed into Henotheism, then monotheism, and finally culminated in monism. In other words, what originally started as mere sacrifices finally blossomed into sublime philosophy, at one point of time, on account of an extreme emphasis upon rituals and sacrifices, vedic culture got destabilised. It then required a Buddha to lend stability by weeding it from all obnoxious ritualistic practices. When Buddha could not be understood properly, it required a Śaṅkara to set the house in order. Similarly, when the philosophy of Śaṅkara outlived its purpose, Rāmānuja came on the scene with his philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita.

When Rāmānuja could not be understood properly, Madhva appeared on the scene. So far, the shocks have been internal. But in the period that followed, the shocks were from outside India. The Islamic invasion and the influence of Islamic culture had to be mitigated by Sikhism. Another external factor of influence was from Christianity which was repelled by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswathi and Swami Vivekananda. The influence of science on modern times was so widespread that it required Sri Aurabindo and a host of others to stabilise Indian culture. In contemporary times, the influence of western culture
has been so extensive that it requires, saints like Sri Sathyasai, Sri Chandra Sekara Saraswathi of Kâñchî, Swami Chinmayananda and a host of others to stem its tide.

3. Rāmānuja - The Stabiliser

A 'rath yatra' in the reverse direction by the vehicle of Indian culture through the main roads, lanes and bylanes of Indian history, thus, reveals a number of bumps and pitfalls that this 'rath' has encountered in its long and hazardous journey, over the centuries. The vehicle having commenced its journey centuries back is in its onward movement, being dextrously handled by able 'drivers'. Among the many, who successfully brought the vehicle to its present destination, Rāmānuja was one such.

It is in this context that Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan observes that the stability that Indian culture has been gaining was not through politician,. soildiers and statesman but "messengers of spirit"^5 who, time and again, emphasised the basic, fundamental non-difference of all creation, though in different ways and terminologies.

^5 Mahadevan, T.M.P., Dr., The Religio-Philosophic Culture of India, In the Cultural Heritage of India (Ed.), Vol.I, p.3.
In the long line of such messengers of 'spirit' came Ramanuja, who by his philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita rejuvenated Indian culture, when it was on the verge of collapse.

4. The Contemporary Challenge to Indian Culture

As in the past, presently also, Indian culture is facing a stiff challenge in the form of western culture and western civilization. The modern western culture seems to believe that life force is a blind, amoral and aimless energy 'the elan vital'. Because of this and also due to faulty education, sophistry, and pedantry, most of us are ignorant of our rich culture. As Nani Palikiwala aptly puts it, we are like asses carrying loads of gold without knowing what the load contains, yearning for western pseudo styles. Not being able to totally adopt western culture nor our native culture, the modern youth is comparable to the legendary "Tri Sanku" hanging in mid air. Eventually the modern youth is caught in the horns of dilemma, unable to decide which is right and which is wrong, making him a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a split personality. When the modern youth cannot understand himself properly, how can he expect to understand others? The result is the kind of present

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society where there are only isolated individuals, like the 'monads' of Leibniz, making the congregation of society, absolutely artificial.

5. Rāmānuja's Philosophy and its contemporary relevance

When individuals thus are isolated units, they come to care only for their own welfare, at the expense of the other individuals, by exploiting them in whatever way they can. For example, we witness presently how the religious passions of common man are taken for personal advantage. In the name of religion, emotions are running riot, dividing mankind into many sectors, each group vying with other for supremacy.

The most urgent need of the hour is that these emotions which are on the destructive side, need to be harnessed and utilised constructively. Towards this end, an awareness in regard to the basic identity not only of human beings but of the entire creation needs to be aroused.

As sparks of the same divine fire, each one has a definite duty towards the other forms of creation. That is, each one has to realise one's true relationship with Reality viz., divinity and in the light of that realization reassess one's association with other human beings.
Various methods are suggested towards this end, suited to the different temperaments of human beings. Of these, to cater to the emotional side of man, Devotion (Bakti), is given as an instrument to bring one face to face with Divinity. Devotion is an expression of emotion but on right side. If the emotions of human beings, now routed on the wrong side, are only properly channelised, what wonders it cannot do!

Devotion being the channeliser of emotions and Rāmānuja, the exponent of the viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy being the champion of Devotion (Bakti), the philosophy of Rāmānuja can play an active role in stabilising contemporary Indian culture.

6. A study of Ramanuja from the perspective of culture

Keeping in view the antiquity of Indian culture with its philosophic backdrop, a study of the philosophy of Rāmānuja as the stabiliser of Indian culture, then and its contemporary relevance will provide a fascinating study and will be off the beaten track. This will also be a continuation of my M.Phil. dissertation entitled "A STUDY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY VAISHNAVISM".

Hence the choice.
7. Contents of the Thesis

The Thesis is divided into four chapters.

The First chapter deals with Culture, Philosophy and Religion and their relationship.

The second chapter gives a Panoramic view of Indian culture. It also narrates how Indian Culture has been destabilised by various extraneous elements and speaks about the stabilisers.

The Third chapter describes how Rāmānuja contributed to the stability of Indian Culture.

The last chapter explains, how the Philosophy of Rāmānuja bears relevance to the contemporary Indian Cultural situation.