CHAPTER 10
CULTURE—THE BEDROCK OF SOCIETY

Culture and civilization are two terms used often by the lay public as well as the academic social philosophers, with different meanings and different backgrounds. Though all social groups belong to one culture or other, an awareness to the concept of culture makes them more reflective and the more we try to grasp the meaning of the term culture, the more confused we become. Culture is one although its definitions and forms may vary depending upon the combination of the three aspects of culture namely, material culture (artefacts and material technology), cognitive culture (level of intellectual development) and normative culture (established standards of behaviour).

10.1 General definition of culture:

Before directly defining culture, Anjali follows an indirect way of expanding the concept of culture by first trying to locate the sphere of culture in the society. Culture, according to him, has a direct bearing upon the sum-total way of living built up by groups of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. It is this organic character that is responsible for the pervasion and identity of culture in spite of variations in some of the culture traits. Anjali gives the example of music which may differ from place to place, but the culture of India
remains the same. Instead of enumerating the various culture traits of India, Rajaji aims at trying to understand the common nature of culture found among all the nations in the midst of specific differences.

10.1.1 Difference between Culture and Morality

Rajaji warns us that there is an essential difference between a good man and a cultured man, which is often confused by people.

Culture is not literacy or ability to play on the tune. It has to do with general behaviour, speech and conduct, and is different from goodness and kindness of character.

Culture is relatively external when compared to the more internal nature of morality. Culture has more to do with behaviour than character which is influenced by the realm of morals. Though Rajaji establishes that there is a difference in locus between culture and morality, he does not neglect the dependence of culture upon morality.

Rajaji refers to the concept of civilisation as a means to locate and identify the elements that go to form the definition of culture in general. Each society has a civilisation of its own depending upon the degree of development. The main indicator of civilisation, Rajaji

in the degree of control of violence, Rajaji takes up the physical dependence of man upon his senses for survival, which leads to a psychological dependence, for the senses are the springs of physical pleasure.

The human animal, unlike his brothers in the dumb world, is inclined to enslave the use of his senses under the influence of the pleasures derived therefrom.

When the total consciousness of the people living together seeks to curb the indulgence in sensual pleasure and direct the activities of the individuals into refined channels, these people are considered to be a civilized people. For Rajaji, the term civilization is an abstract noun indicating a state of living and not things. Culture aims at curbing wildness and barbarity and over-indulgence of passions and appetites.

10.1.2 The Two Instruments of Civilization

Rajaji identifies culture as one of the two instruments of civilization aimed at regulating people. The other instrument is the government, which works externally. In extreme cases the individual is either excommunicated or is confined within prison walls. The governmental form of social control is external and has its own limitations. While culture is internal when compared to government, it is external to morality. Government belongs to the external sphere of state authority, culture comes under social training.

2. Ibid., p.3.
and conditioning and morality belong to the innermost springs of human conscience.

What the Government is able to achieve by force, culture is able to achieve by family training, tradition, religious belief, literature and education. While penal laws are to be obeyed, culture does not create the feeling that one has to obey something from outside. Under the influence of culture, the individual acts in harmony with the ideals of the society without feeling that he is submitting himself to some external authority. Through the subtle ways of culture the individual takes pride in doing what the society wants him to do. The wrong doer falls low in the estimation of others and social sanction exerts its influence in shaping the behaviour of the individual.

We all know how strong this sanction (social) is. Often it corrects where force does not correct. Force generates a reaction of obstinacy. But the subtle forms of the displeasure of society are very effective, as they give a chance to the culprit to improve without a confession of guilt. They do not generate obstinacy.

10.1.3 Culture as Self-Control

Rajaji refers to two higher forms of self-control, namely, jnanam and bhakti, which involve a voluntary subjection to painful processes. Religion trains the individual to gain an intense love towards God and leads to bhakti, which produces joy of a higher order. In

3. Ibid., p.3.
addition to jainism and bhakti there are other legitimate forms of achieving regulation and sublimation of the appetite of human nature. Combining the elements so far discussed Rajaji defines culture as follows: "Indeed, it may be truly said that culture is the habit of successful self-control; and that nothing that reduces self-control or which does not help self-control is culture." 

Fine arts, music, dance and painting and entertainments of many kinds are cultural means to bring effective moderation of individual behavior. An objection may be raised here that there is a contradiction regarding the treatment of fine arts like music. It was cited earlier that learning to 'play on the vina' does not make a man to be identified as a cultured man. At the same time Rajaji encouraged the cultivation of taste for such pursuits. This apparent contradiction may be solved as follows: A mere association with a means is different from what the means can procure. That Rajaji denied was the wrong identification of the man who knows how to 'play on the vina' with a man who is cultured after such training and exposure to refined ways of life. If once this distinction is understood the so-called contradiction in Rajaji will be found to be meaningless.

The check on self-destruction, at the lower forms of
life, is achieved through instincts. But man is able to achieve self-regulation through the proper use of reason and awareness of what he is doing. The choice is given to man either to give full freedom to his wild impulses and kill himself or to regulate himself through reason. A little reflection will reveal that most of the social evils have their origin in lack of self-control. Whether it is the obstinate bureaucrat or the wild mob bent upon violence, we can trace the weakness to the uncontrolled senses. Culture as a form of 'self-control' may look simple, but is capable of achieving self-regulation at the individual level and social harmony at the level of the society.

10.2 The ethical nature of culture

Rajaji's approach to the definition of culture can be interpreted from the point of view of the traditional concept of *yama* (the five restraints). The five restraints are ways to check the impulses of man who runs after the satisfaction of his senses beyond limits. The man of restraint is praised for his control of the senses (*indriya nishrana*) in Indian mythology. Characters like Rama and Krishna are taken to be ideal types of cultured man because of their self-controlled behaviour (*indriya nishrana*). The mythological heroes serve as examples of men in whom militant leadership was subordinated to qualities of love and compassion, thereby showing to the world that self-control is not restricted to the
aesthetic alone and that it is necessary for any one to be a
member of the society.

10.2.1 The positive moral qualities of culture:

Bajaji includes certain moral virtues in his
explanation of culture, although they are not explicitly
stated in his definition of culture. Culture does not
consist merely of a set of observances which lead to control
of one self. There is a positive content which is ethical in
nature. Bajaji refers to enlightenment as forming the
positive content of culture. Bajaji expresses this view as
follows:

Self-restraint in expression is one of the
main forms of culture. Self-restraint in
conduct is a sign and an essential of what is
called culture. But self-restraint in thought
is at the root of both. 5

Culture should have its base in positive moral
qualities, without which culture will seem mere hypocrisy.
Culture and morality are related to each other like the peel
and the inner juicy part of a fruit. The orange peel may
at times seem more pleasant because of its aroma, but it
cannot match with the inner fruit. Similarly cultured
behaviour may look more pleasant but is not as valuable or
as rich as virtuous character.

One of the virtues of character is the capacity of
putting oneself in the position of the other and trying to

5. KMA., p.4.
realize what is right or wrong. The following line from the Kṣa in quoted by Bājaji to express this point of view:

**Kṣa** in quoted by Bājaji to express this point of view.

Bājaji (7th century) argues that once the individual begins to introspect and sees the truth he will understand that putting others to pain in intolerable. The whole philosophy of humanism depends on this simple principle of life which does not require any theoretical understanding to grasp this point. Consideration for the feelings of others, for the rights of others, and even for the faults of others forms the mark of culture according to Bājaji. Restraint combined with consideration for others forms an easy premise to support the concept of grace in human behavior.

The second virtue, Bājaji says, agrees with what is taught in the Śloka, which runs as follows:

**Śloka**: 

Bājaji (7th century) argues that when the word Arūpana refers to the enlightened man who is bent upon gathering 'true' knowledge, "Knowledge and humility, together form wealth for the Arūpana." Without humility knowledge becomes the hand maid of the petty ego of man and the individual becomes boastful and self-conceited. In the absence of humility the possession of knowledge leads...
to lack of sympathy and consideration for others. Rajaji refers to the story of Sakuna, in his English rendering of the Naka Maratha, in which the throne refers to one Sakuna, who by penance and sacrifice rose to the post of Indra and by his own self-conceited behaviour incurred the wrath of learned men and lost all that he gained. 5

The third positive virtue of a cultured man is his contribution to society which adds to the overall joy of its members in the form of discharging one's responsibilities and doing service to others. Even in speech one should be pleasant so that the other individual is not mentally hurt unnecessarily. Quoting profusely from the AYUR, Rajaji reminds us that a sweet disposition creates better effect. "The gift that is thrown by the uncultured man at the distressed, without these accompaniments of the welcome look and soft word, does not reduce suffering but hurts." 9 Courteous demeanor was considered a very essential quality of the cultured man according to traditional India as portrayed in the scriptures.

10.3.2 A theoretical and spiritual basis for virtue:

Rajaji's approach to ethics is similar to Kant's approach, which he himself states as follows: "Be unto others


as you would be done by: आत्मान्वे व्रजने प्रव्रज. This is the
essence of culture in word and action.\textsuperscript{10}

Once the individual is able to understand and
appreciate the spirit of this statement he automatically
develops an attitude to treat every one as a member of the
kingdom of ends and not as means. Rajaji’s concept of
treating every one as an end can be traced to the following
verse from the तैरावय वर्धियाः:

यास्ति सन्तुष्टि तत्सन्तुष्टि सन्तुष्टि
भर्तृरतो बुद्धिः सदाः न मिल्लते

"One who sees all creatures in himself will see
himself in all creatures and thereby does not
hate anybody."\textsuperscript{11}

This scriptural source gives an idealistic justifi-
cation to accept everyone as an end.

Combining the various elements of Rajaji’s definition
of culture we can arrive at the following theoretical basis:
a) The negative aspect of Rajaji’s definition is essentially
biological and sociological. It is biological in the sense
that any excessive indulgence will exhaust and exterminate
life. It is sociological in the sense that the practice of
self-control prevents the law of the jungle and maintains
social order. b) The positive virtues are evolved from the point

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.} p.2.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.} p.3.
of view of the acceptance of the existence of the Self and its equal status in all creatures which leads to treating everyone as an end.

Logically the negative and the positive aspects of Rajaji's approach to culture provide ample scope for humanism at the world level by regulating the impulse for war and promoting the concept of service to humanity. It is only from this point of view that Rajaji referred to Vedanta as the saviour of the whole world. "Co-operation protects the community. Government and patriotism protect the country. Vedanta protects the whole world." 12

10.2.5 National Culture

After defining the nature of culture at the individual level, Rajaji proceeds to the question of the culture of a group of people. The culture of a group of people or of a nation, according to Rajaji, is either the standard of behaviour laid down by the enlightened men of the group and accepted by the general public or it may be the actual behaviour of people including the prevailing images and failures. These two approaches mark the nature of extreme forms of setting up cultural ideals for a nation. Rajaji is of the opinion that people often confuse between these two extreme types of cultural patterns. He gives the following analysis of how patterns of culture can be evolved.

1) The unattainable ideals laid down by a few enlightened without recognition from the public.

2) High ideals laid down by a few and also acknowledged and accepted by the public.

3) Actual behaviour of people with minimum emphasis on norms.

The first variety of evolving a national culture breeds hypocrisy from the public, who would only pay lip-service to the ideals in public and transgress the norms in private. At times the common man may develop hatred to the ideals simply because he thinks that such ideals are meant for the 'elite'. In some cases high idealism without acceptance may create a dual system of values which is reflected in the pattern of socialisation of children who are confused, because the books and the elders say something, which the elders do not follow. We can apply Mjajji's analysis to understand and evaluate many of the social disorders caused by the application of double standard morality. The individuals placed in such dual systems are likely to exhibit a dual self which leads to much frustration and personality disorders. So the first alternative of the unattainable abstract ideals laid down by the high moralists of a people cannot be taken literally to represent the pattern of culture of a people.

Culture, according to Mjajji, has definite relation to fact and prevalence and cannot rest on mere ideology.
The authors of Dharma Sūtras like Gautama, Vaiśnavaikya, Brhaspati and Kautilya advise the king to take into consideration the local customs and habits of people, which may at times run contrary to the established order. Under such circumstances the king can grant exception in order to give due recognition to some of the deeply formed habits of the people who belong to an entirely different frame of cultural norms. Rajaji accepts the second alternative to be the guiding principle in working out a pattern of culture for a certain people. "The culture of a people is what is desired and expected by the best among the people, actually to prevail and govern their daily life." 13 This view provides ample elbow room for variety and social change without losing sight of the inner core of national character. Probably Rajaji has the concept of Yoga Dharma in mind while expressing this moderate approach.

The third alternative is the lowest, which does not pay importance to ideology and Rajaji says that at the most it may serve the historian to make surveys of cultures and report them. A society without regard for norms cannot differentiate between social change and social progress and may drift along without any norm.

According to Rajaji, mere differences between cultures need not be misconstrued for stunted development of culture

13. C. Rajagopalachari, Our Symbols, p. 111.
If the society under study is given to 'simplicity' as its ideal. If 'simplicity' is an ideal and if a society is able to reach its ideal of 'simplicity' by a well-organized society, then such a society can be considered as more successful than a society which aims at complexity and fails in achieving its ideal. The approach made by Ruth Benedict in her *Patterns of Culture* refers to the Semi society (an agricultural society in America) in which the emphasis is on 'simplicity' and social order. The Semi society does not give much importance to exceptional achievements which involve any disturbance to social order. This sacrifice of not clamouring for popularity has its own rewards in maintaining social order. Hajaji refutes the Western way of considering 'simple' societies as examples of stunted cultural development.

10.3 The Learning of Classics (Hijzam and Mi'?,?)

The question of preserving a culture and handing down to posterity requires the support from well-established institutions and a system of mythology to reinforce the national ethos. Mythology and social institutions form a coherent system which have to be studied together and assessed together.

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10.3.1 Social Institutions and Culture

The traditional Indian society has provided the individual, certain goals which shape the individual's judgments, decisions and patterns of behaviour to act within the frame work of dharma.

The smallest social unit through which the individual develops his attitude towards himself and life as a whole with reference to his society is the family. The individual is not directly placed in the scheme of national culture or the Dharma Dharma. Dharma Dharma being wide and diffused cannot have such effect directly upon the individual. There is hierarchy of social organization through which the individual learns to identify himself with the wider social circle by stages. The smallest and the nearest unit is the family which can draw greater loyalty and attention from individual because of its social proximity and warmth. The obligations imposed by the family Dharma are binding and demand fulfilment over a wider circle and failure brings about social obloquy. The individual acts through a system of family norms, and marriages to a certain extent are arranged with reference to the overall approval of the family. This does not mean that the individual is excluded in the choice of his partner with his own preference. The family has a check on the individual only to prevent the more play of chance which may develop a blind spot for clear judgment.
The individual does not take a leap into the wider circle of the nation directly from the family, we have the community or the jati, which is a larger family circle. One's duties do not end with one's wife and children. His obligations, mutual help, respect and recognition extend to the members of his jati, to all those who 'belong' to one. Rajaji refers to the jatig which devotes a full chapter to one's loyalty to the jati. Rajaji considers this as a kind of decentralized socialism without the compulsions of statist policy but enforced by effective social edicts on failure. Marriage within the jati created a union of members brought up and acquainted in the trade allotted according to one's kula dharna. The social control exerted by this hierarchy, Rajaji observes, maintained social order even during the worst periods of political chaos.

India had probably the largest number and very big time-lengths of intervals between one effective government and another. There have been a great many periods during which the people had neither central nor regional government's exercising effective authority. All these periods of what may be called a no-government condition could not possibly have been tided over but for the self-restraints imposed by our culture, the joint family, and the jati discipline. 15

The king was only a figure-head and the rest went according to institutional order. People entered into

contracts, showed respect for property and possessions and
charities were founded even when there was 'no law in the
Austrian sense.' The joint family and the jati discipline
took care of India's culture whether there was a government
or not.

10.3.2 Convincing the popular mind:

The respect for the doctrines of Karma and rebirth
and leading a detached and simple life are driven deep into
the personality of the average man through a more psychologico
way of presenting the drama of life than through cold
philosophy. This does not mean that abstract philosophical
thinking lacks recognition in the Indian scheme but it is
reserved for the more involved types of people in logical
reasoning, who can withstand the results of intellectual
speculation with a sense of detachment.

From a purely philosophical point of view mythology
may be considered as pure fantasy, but from the point of
view of convincing people to accept a set of doctrines, a
certain degree of eulogic support from mythology is
needed. Mythology, whether historically valid or not, has
a stronger effect in reinforcing a value system than cold
logic. Probably one set of mythologies may be replaced by
another set of mythologies, but the readiness with which
man accepts the archetypes through mythology is a sociological
factor worth considering.

Mythology is an integral part of religion. It is an accessory for religion and national culture as the skin and the skeleton that preserve a fruit with its juice and its taste. Yarn is no less essential than substance. We cannot squeeze religion and hope to bottle and keep the essence by itself. It would neither be very useful nor last very long. Mythology and holy figures are necessary for any great culture to rest on its stable spiritual foundation and function as a life-giving inspiration and guide. 16

Anjali chose the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which are considered to be storehouses of Indian culture and also keep in record the way the ancient seers wished to propagate dharma by representing the struggle between the divine and the brutal elements in man. Anjali says, that whether the people remember the details regarding the works of Vedanta Śaṅkara or not they remember the greatness of Rama and Krishna, Sita the ideal woman, the devotion of Hanuman and so on. The epics also emphasize the Hindu concept of Āyānāṁ because of which the model heroes of the epics are worshipped as God and the attempt to create a devotional identity with virtuous personality types is successfully achieved.

Bridging the gulf between man and God is made possible by humanizing God, who acts according to his station setting an example to the society. The stories portray the various

shades of human weakness by bringing their characters into various situations and serve as a model and warning to us.

It is necessary to bring home the fact that even wise, good and great men are liable to fall into error. That is why the Puranas, although ever seeking to instil dharma, contain narratives to show how in this world even good people sometimes sin against dharma, as though irresistibly driven to do so. This is to press home the truth that however learned one may be, humility and constant vigilance are absolutely necessary if one wishes to avoid evil. 17

The story of Abhalya is another example to show how there is a danger of falling into sin, at times, even because of minor lapses. Along with the portrayal of errors the epics show how there is scope for revival through a course of rigorous penance and discipline accompanied by genuine repentance. "Instead of condemning others for their sins, we should look within our own hearts and try to purify them of every evil thought. The best of us have need for eternal vigilance, if we would escape sin. This is the moral of Abhalya’s error." 18 The epics combine knowledge and devotion to kindle the divine in men. When some of the scenes are replayed mentally the hidden goodness with which man is born comes to play giving a new dimension to one’s value system.

Rajaji observes that, there is a tendency among some people to criticize the epic as a collection of follies and inconsistencies committed even by divine characters. Rama is blamed for punishing Soorpanaka, for killing Vali from a hidden position and suspecting the fidelity of his loyal wife and banishing her. Such a view, Rajaji says, is based on 'heartless cleverness' devoid of true understanding and humility.

Behind the story of errors and sorrows the poet enables us to have a vision of the Transcendent Reality. Thus it is that the Mahabharata, though a story, has come to be a book of Dharma ... when we read them, our inner being is seized and cleansed, so to say, by being passed alternatively through joys and sorrows, and we are finally lifted above both and taken to the Transcendent Real. 19

The dilemmas, the errors and grace, presented in mythology provide the necessary stimulus for the development of the finer emotions and integration of the emotional side of our personality with a life of reason and sacrifice. It is this happy combination of the ideal and the actual type in mythology that maintains a respect in our hearts, for the social ideals without losing sight of Dharma.