CHAPTER – 3

Society, Culture and Civilization

*Culture is the psychological cultivation of the mind, which yields values that govern human behaviour and human relations. Culture is the culturing or cultivation of human mind.*
Man consists of two factors, the mind and the body. Mind with its consciousness is said to be directly opposed to, though somehow or other intimately connected with, the body with its extension; for, the mind has no extension; and the body, consciousness. Now, the consciousness of mind assumes the form of reason in man, while consciousness is the common property of all living beings. Hence is the celebrated, yet much condemned, definition of man, man is a rational animal. In this way, man has two sides – a higher rational side; a lower animal one. A perfect man is he who can work out a perfect synthesis between these two sides of his nature with, of course, the higher controlling the lower, as natural and beneficial. A perfect society also, therefore, is one in which there is such a perfect synthesis between spiritualism and materialism, with, of course, the former controlling the latter, as inevitable and essential.

Society is, of course, a divine institution. Still, from the practical point of view, its inner divinity, real nature, has to be manifested. And, then this great fact has to be kept in mind, viz. that it has to manifest, and not manufacture Truth. As a matter of fact, Truth, real Truth cannot be manufactured at all at will; it can be only manifested through wisdom and good sense.

Vivekananda’s concept of society, though derived from Vedantik philosophy, seeks to integrate both the spiritualistic and materialistic interpretations of both man and society; it is both individualistic and socialistic. Believing in the divine nature of man, Vivekananda seeks to establish a continuum between society, culture and civilization, like the wick, oil and the flame. This approximates the integral view of both man and society. There is no anti-thesis between the two.

Vivekananda says, "Two attempts have been made in the world to found social life. The one was upon religion or spirituality or transcendentalism, and the other was upon social necessity or materialism or realism. The one looks beyond the horizon of the little material world.. While the other is content to stand on things of the world and expects to find a firm footing there." Referring to Western and Eastern society he observed, "The West is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks, and the East is groaning under the tyranny of the priests, each must keep the other in check. Do not think that one alone is to help the world." Thus, it is clear that Vivekananda admits the necessity of both -- Spiritualism and Materialism, Idealism and Realism. Both are complementary to each other. Vivekananda is quite familiar with the West’s materialistic approach to life. So he warns the West to make spirituality the
basis of her life. He writes, "The whole Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years, if there is no spiritual foundation."³

In Vivekananda’s view, “The Western man is born individualistic, while the Hindu is socialistic – entirely socialistic.”⁴ In marriage, and many other affairs in the West, each individual can assert that he or she will abide by personal predilection and not be directed to by others. The Hindu demands that the individual shall bow down to the needs of society, and that those needs shall regulate his personal behaviour. As a result of these two attitudes, the West has granted freedom to society, so that society has grown and become dynamic, whereas the Hindu society has become cramped in every way. Pointing out this distinction he says, "In India, religion was never shackled ...On the other hand, a fixed point was necessary to allow this infinite variation to religion, and society was chosen as that point in India. As a result, society became rigid and almost immovable....On the other hand, in the West, the field of variation was society, and the constant point was religion.... The result is a splendid social organization with a religion that never rose beyond the grossest materialistic conceptions."⁵

Life differs in the East and the West, because the goals are different. He asseverates, "Of the West, the goal is individual independence, the language money-making education, the means politics; of India, the goal is Mukti, the language the Veda, the means renunciation."⁶ The contrast is complete, both as regards the ideal and the means of its realization.

In India, the emphasis on spirituality, reinforced by renunciation, has produced a type of culture that is different from that in the West. The West goes on multiplying its wants, while the East tries to remain satisfied with what little it can get. In the West, happiness and laughter are on the surface; but inside it is all sorrow. The East is sombre outside, but full of contentment inside. In the West, the need for satisfying wants gives rise to material prosperity; in the East, renunciation leads to poverty.

He noted that the Indian reformers of his days, dazzled by the glamour of Western civilization failed to distinguish between the two outlooks on life, and, consequently, they believed that India's salvation lay in a blind imitation of everything Western. In his book ‘East and West’, he further pointed out that, in addition to the basic outlooks, one had to take into account the climatic, historical, and other influences, which mould a nation's character. Dress, food, architecture, personal behaviour, etc., are largely the products of geographical
conditions. Besides, to understand a society, one must have personal experience of its inner working; superficial studies are greatly misleading. Hence Vivekananda writes:

There is such a wide divergence between Western society and the Indian as regards the primal course and goal of each that any sect in India, framed after the Western model, will miss the aim.⁷

He observed, “The spell of imitating the West was getting such a strong hold upon India that what is good or what is bad was no longer decided by reason, judgement, discrimination, or reference to the Sastras.”⁸

While making a choice between the imitative, soft-brained, orthodox bigot, he preferred the latter, "There are two obstacles in our path in India—the Scylla of old orthodoxy and the Charibadis of modern European civilization. Of these two, I vote for the old orthodoxy, and not for the Europeanized system; for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, he may be crude, but he is a man, he has a faith, he has strength, he stands on his own feet, while the European man has no backbone.”⁹ Vivekanand further points out, "In spite of the sparkle and glitter of Western civilization... I tell them to their face, that it is all vain.”¹⁰ The civilization of the West is derived from the Greeks, whose watchword was expression, as against the Indian keynote of meditativeness. Hence Western art excels in perfection of form, whereas Indian art tells of deep thoughts. Europe is engrossed so much in action and expression that it has hardly any time for meditation, while India thinks so deeply that she hardly knows how to express or act. The extrovert West tends to keep itself confined to matter, whereas the introvert east is liable to get lost in the non-material.

The conceptions of God, religion, and other things also conform to this external tendency in the West. He solemnly asserts, "Politics, social improvement, in one word, this world, is the goal of mankind in the West, and God and religion come in quietly as helpers to attain the goal. Their God is, so to speak, the Being who helps to cleanse and to furnish this world for them.”¹¹ All this may be described as a tribal or materialistic conception of God. The West is reconciled to God when things go well, but angry when suffering is the lot. Vivekananda, thus pointed out that all the great religious systems originated in the East. Indian society survived a hundred shocks similar to those under which the old civilizations of Greece, Rome, Babylon, and Egypt crumbled down. That shows the intrinsic vitality of Indian culture and its power of recuperating after every fall. The fact is that the West has yet to learn the secrets of a stable society from India.
As for the relative superiority of the West, it is a myth. For instance, the West may laugh at India's caste system, but in India, it is based on spirituality; elsewhere, on money or power. The Indians might appear impractical in worldly affairs; but they are very practical in religious matters. Evils there are everywhere. But that does not constitute a reason for wholesale condemnation. If the Indian widows are supposedly sentenced to life-long servitude, the despondency of the unmarried maidens makes the Western atmosphere gloomy. If child-marriage weakened the Hindus, late marriage led to sexual promiscuity in the West. We have our oppressive priestcraft, the West has its Shylocks. The Indian peasant may be poor, but poverty does not make him criminal; the Indians are religious; while in the West, the masses are very ill-behaved, thus, neither society presents humanity at its best.

In brief, Vivekananda's comparative study of the East and the West is in the secular sphere. But in the spiritual sphere, he unhesitatingly declares that India can still become the teacher of the whole world. Not only can the Vedanta philosophy of India stand its own ground against all scientific and rational onslaughts; but it can also take under its protective wings all who search for rational assurance. He propounds, "The nations of the West are coming to us for spiritual help. A great moral obligation rests on the sons of India to fully equip themselves for the work of enlightening the world on the problems of human existence."12

In spiritual outlook, the two halves of the globe differ widely. In India, people trace their nobility to the seers of old, but in Europe one feels proud if one can trace one's lineage to a robber. Vivekananda accepted that the Eastern masses may be ignorant about politics and economics, but not in spiritual matters. He asserts:

If you ask a European ploughman about party politics or monetary or scientific problems, he will prove that he is well versed in these matters; but ask him about religion, he will simply say that he goes to church or belongs to a denomination. The Hindu peasant, on the other hand, can teach you volumes about mythology—religious beliefs, and philosophy.13

Religion has become somehow subordinate to secular needs in the West. This is proved by the revolt in Russia against religion, which submitted to Czarist dictation and justified the oppression of the masses. As against this, Indian spirituality kept itself free from secular trammels through her independent world-renouncing sannyasis, and selfless poor Brahmins Protestant West denied monasticism and the result has been that it has not
produced a single outstanding saint during the past centuries. The philosophical thoughts of Western religious people merely follow scholasticism or theology. Like their Greek predecessors they are searching for truth externally. As a result, science has developed and the spirit has been cramped, and consequently, religion can hardly command the allegiance of the intelligentia. It suffers from arrested growth, dogmatism, and superficiality. Thus Vivekananda observed that Western society lacks a stable foundation in spirituality. He vibrantly asserts, "I must tell you frankly that the very foundations of Western civilization have been shaken to their base. The mightiest buildings, if built upon the loose sand foundations of materialism, must totter to their destruction some day." The priests in the West do not command respect. Christ's life of renunciation is totally ignored. His higher teaching about unity and divinity of man are misinterpreted; and sects are organized on the basis of superficial dogmas. Worse still, the missionaries identify themselves with colonialism. They, as also the foreign scholars, start with prejudice and thus can never appreciate the Hindu history, literature, philosophy, and culture. Hence their hollow criticism either alienates or amuses the Hindu intelligentia. The result has been that, after Vivekananda's advent, the West, also, has learnt that all is not as well at home or as bad abroad as the missionaries represent. The West cannot ignore the fact that its religion is at a low ebb now, and society in a state of confusion.

However, Vivekananda's criticism of the West is, therefore, matched by his more caustic criticism of the East. When his countrymen characterize the Westerners as materialists, he turns upon them with the remark. 'Grapes are sour'. He observes, "How much of enterprise and devotion to work, how much enthusiasm and manifestation of rajas (activism) are there in the lives of the Western people. While in India it is as if the blood has become congealed in the heart, so that it cannot circulate in the veins – as if paralysis has overtaken the body and it has become languid." So he wants first to make the people active by developing their rajasa. He further stressed that if Indians are to live as a nation, they must learn 'mechanism', 'the sciences of physical nature', 'organisation and art of government', from the West and yet preserve spirituality as the central theme of life. At the same time he emphasized that "what will save Europe is the religion of the Upanisads." Vivekananda is of the opinion, "The thoughtful men of the West will find in our ancient philosophy especially in the Vedanta, the new impulse of thought they are seeking, the very spiritual food and drink for which they are hungering and thirsting."
According to the Indian view, society is not a human creation, but a divine institution. The Indian Monotheistic Doctrine of Creation holds that the universe of souls and matter is a cosmos, not a chaos, and not only that, it is also an entirely teleological or a purposive one. Like nature, society, too, is a perfect system. It is a full organic whole, a loving and a living union. Its basis is religion, its purpose, spiritualism, and its instruments scriptural injunctions. He asserts, "It is not a political organisation, not an economic unit and not a prudential concern at all."\(^{21}\)

His view of society is quite in consonance with the spirit of Vedanta. He writes, "The whole universe is simply an ocean of matter, of which you and I are like little whirlpools….. the matter that is in my body may have been in yours a few years ago, or in the sun, or in a plant and so on, in a continuous state of flux."\(^{22}\) He believes in the oneness of body. Similarly he says, "The whole of our lives is one, we are one even in thought. This oneness is a fact that is being proved everyday by modern science."\(^{23}\) He further writes, "The self is the essence of this universe, the essence of all souls. Brahman is the universe Himself."\(^{24}\) According to Vivekananda every soul is divine and Moksa (Liberation) means only the realisation of this eternal divinity—the unity, Universality and Oneness.

His concept of society is in consonance with the principles laid down in the Rig Vedic `Purusa-Sukta', In this Sukta the whole of society has been conceived as a universal or social Man. Of Him, society is only a reflex; and the various vocational groups are His different limbs. This social Man, or Purusa, is pictured there as 'thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, and thousand-legged', who spreads over all the earth and rules over all living creatures. The mouth, or rather the head, of this Purusa-of society-is the Brahman, the man of knowledge, of science, of thought and learning, the preserver of its spiritual heritage; His arms are the Ksatriya, the man of action, of valour the preserver of law and order in society; His trunk is the Vaisya, the man of desires, of acquisitive nature, and of business enterprise; His legs are represented by the Sudra, the man or little or ordinary intelligence, who is unable to deal with subtle and abstract ideas, and who is chiefly suited to do physical work. These four types of people are to be found in every society, though the classification gradually became crystallized in Hindu society because of some varnas claiming exclusive privilege and superiority over others. It should, however, be noted here that the varna classification was made on the basis of the congenial vocational temperaments and aptitudes of the people, and not to uphold the superiority or the privileges of some individuals because of their birth and heredity.
In his ultimate analysis of society, Vivekananda also puts forward the organic analogy and asserts:

The aggregate of many individuals is called Samashti (the whole), and each individual is 'called Vyashti (a part). You and I each is Vyashti, society is Samashti. You, I and animal, bird, a worm, an insect, a tree, a creeper, the earth, a planet, a star, each is Vyashti while this universe is Samashti.25

3.1 An Ideal Form of Society

To Vivekananda, an ideal form of society is that where the highest truth can be held, practised and lived by all. At another place he writes, "The ideal society would be the one in which would be synthesised the Indian idea of spiritual integrity and the western idea of social progress."26 He writes further, "If society is not fit for highest truths; make it so, and the sooner, the better."27 He further says, "Societies should be moulded upon truth, and truth has not to adjust itself to society. If it cannot be practiced in society, it is better for man to give up society and go into the forest."28 Society is a divine institution. It has to manifest Truth -- its real nature -- and not to manufacture truth. Here the question arises: what is the Highest Truth according to Vivekananda? His answer is:

The Existent is only one

Only one without a second

All this, verily is Brahman

This soul is Brahman.29

From this Highest Truth follows the principle of universal fraternity and service to mankind as advocated by Vivekananda in his social philosophy. One of the noblest conceptions of Hindu social organisation is that of the four stages of life, “The student, the householder, the hermit, and the monk.”30 Renunciation forms the basis of all these stages of life. While the principle of renunciation pervades the activities of the first three stages of life, in the last stage, man is required to renounce the world totally to gain spiritual wisdom before his life on earth terminates. According to Vivekananda, “All the men and women, in any society, are not of the same mind, capacity, or of the same power to do things.”31 They cannot embrace a life of complete detachment from the world. Hence, for those who cannot do so, Hinduism offers the way of action, with graded discipline, to help them in their onward journey to spiritual
perfection. If pursued with the spirit of yoga, both the paths prove equally effective in carrying the individual to the shores of immortality. Vivekananda held that the life of action, based on devotion and discrimination, was as sacred a path as that of renunciation. What testifies to a truly religious life is the inner spiritual qualities of man, and not the outward forms and observances.

Vivekananda believes that the history of the world is the manifestation of four principles which find their concrete realization in the fourfold social varnas -- the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra. The spiritual principle, he thinks, is embodied in Indian history. The history of Roman expansion and imperialism represents the Kshatriya or military factor in action. The British mercantile aristocracy is the concrete demonstration of the ascendancy of the Vaisya principle, while "The American democracy will represent the Sudrocracy of the future."

By and large he feels, "the east symbolized the concept of suffering while the west typifies the notion of action and struggle." Vivekananda maintains that Alexander, Chinghiz Khan and Napoleon were inspired by the vision of unity -- "to unify the world." He also traces, "The similarity between the Vedic and the Roman Catholic ritual and holds the view that the latter had been derived from the former through Buddhism, which he considers a branch of Hinduism." Vivekananda asserts:

Indian thought influenced Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and the Neo-Platonist like Porphyry, Iamblichus, etc. In the modern world, Indian thought has influenced Western Europe, especially Germany.

In ancient Indian history, Vivekananda observes, "There was a dialectical tussle between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The Brahmins represents conservative historicism and were the spokesmen of customs, traditions, and conventions and institutionalized patterns of behaviour. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, stands for a radical liberalism. Rama and Krishna also belonged to the Kshatriya aristocracy. Buddha is champion of a Kshatriya reaction. Kumarila, Samkara and Ramanuja, on the other hand tried to re-establish priestly power but failed."

Vivekananda is inspired "by the ideal of social harmony and synthesis embodied in the theory of Varna (caste) system of ancient India." Originally, Varna system is the division of individuals into different sections or classes, according to their different tendencies and capacities. He does not propose any leveling of castes but he earnestly wanted
that the caste system should be ennobled. He says, "Caste is a very good thing. Caste is the plan we want to follow ...There is no country in the world without caste. In India, from caste we reach to the point where there is no caste." To him caste is a means to help everybody in attaining the status of a true Brahmin. A Brahmin is he who has killed all selfishness. To be a Brahmin is to be spiritually enlightened.

To prove this thesis further, Vivekananda argued, "As there are `Sattva', `Rajas' and `Tamas'-- one or other of these gunas are more or less is/are inherent in every man and form the basis of the qualities which make a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or a Shudra. But at times, one or other of these qualities predominates in him in varying degrees and is manifested accordingly ...it is quite possible for one to be changed from one caste into another. Otherwise, how did Vishvamitra become a Brahmin and Parushrama Kshatriya?" Thus basically, by caste, Vivekananda meant the raising of individuals gently and slowly towards the realization of the noble ideal of spiritually enlightened man.

Vivekananda was against the abolition of the original caste system. He suggested that the caste in its degenerate state must be abolished. He pointed out, "From the time of Upanisads down to the present day, nearly all our great teachers have wanted to break through the barriers of caste, i.e. caste in its degenerated state, not the original system." He was of the view that the original idea behind the caste-system has rendered a great service to society. It was the most glorious social institution. Caste should not go, but should only be modified accordingly. Vivekananda advocates that the new method is the evolution of the old. He believes, "Within the old structure is to be found life enough for the re-building of two hundred thousand new ones."

Vivekananda condemned the old orthodox Brahmanical doctrine of adhikaravada. This doctrine propounds the exclusion of the Sudras from the benefit of the Vedantic knowledge. Samkara also adhered to this undemocratic dogma. But Vivekananda very strongly championed the concept of spiritual equality. He bitterly criticised the existing social order in India based upon inequality of privileges. He calls it priestcraft. Defining the concept of privilege he says, "The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege." It is the bane of India. It is immoral. Vivekananda poses a question here and asks-"Can man degrade his brother and himself escape degradation?" ...Can one injure anyone without injuring himself? His answer is "no." He further says, "the mass of Brahmans and Kshatriya tyranny has recoiled upon their own heads with compound interest."
Vivekananda travelled all over India and he was deeply shocked to see with his own eyes that millions of people in India live on flowers of the Mohua plant and their blood is sucked by a million or two of sadhus and a hundred million or so of Brahmans. He was convinced that this grinding poverty is the result of exploitation, tyranny and oppression on the part of the priestcraft and the privileged classes of India. He asks, "Can there be any effect without cause? Can there be punishment without sin." He further exclaimed, "Ah tyrants! You do not know that to obverse is tyranny and the reverse, slavery. The slave and the tyrant are synonymous. The tyranny of the minority is the worst tyranny in the world." Explaining the effects of tyranny Vivekananda furthers says, "The lowest castes in India have been reduced to the state of professional beggars and have lost their manliness." It is the result of the blows and kicks given to them by the higher castes at every step. Explaining the nature of priest craft, Vivekananda said, "It is in its nature cruel and heartless. That is why religion goes down where priest craft arises." In Vedanta, there is no idea of privilege.

Vivekananda stressed that orthodoxy must go from society. To him society is a stratified organisation. Man lives in groups and performs his own function according to his capacity. Suppose, one man can govern the country and another can mend shoes but that is no reason why the former must trample over the head of other. ‘This will have to go’. He further says, "No privilege for any one equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the divine is within and every one will work out his salvation." Pointing to the impact of this tyranny on society Vivekananda said, "That is why one-fifth of our people have become Mohammedan. It was not the sword that did it all. It would be height of madness to think so. And one-fifth-one half of your Madras people will become Christians if you do not take care." He maintained that all men are equal and equally entitled to spiritual wisdom. Every man should get his due. Indeed, his theory of democratic spiritualism was a radical step.

In the magnificent structure of Indian society, every brick is an indispensable part of the structure, and it ought to be good and strong. As each brick takes a certain load, and without it the structure becomes weaker to that extent, every individual member of society fulfils a certain function in it, thus contributing to the general welfare of the social structure as a whole. Individuals in a community have, each one of them, their allotted duty to perform, which if conscientiously discharged, will make for the smooth running of society, For this, every one must equip himself mentally, morally, and spiritually.

The Indian social organisation lays emphasis on opportunity and obligation, rather than on right and privilege. Every individual in society is expected to perform certain duties.
according to his Guna and karma, inborn aptitudes and abilities. A Hindu is called upon to observe certain primary obligations, called masses i.e. debts to be discharged to the gods, to the *rishis*, to the progenitors of the race, to fellowmen in society, and to all other creatures belonging to the sub-human species. The wonderful scheme of *varnasrama dharma*, actuated and guided by the four *purusartha* of dharma, artha, kama and moksa, was formulated by Indian ancestors chiefly to aid man in his evolution from the biological to the spiritual plane of existence. In Indian society, man is not looked upon as a mere specimen of a zoological species, but as a member of a social group which reflects in its organization the scheme of values for the realization of which the group exists. By education and social discipline, the individual is helped to develop the inner conviction essential for social stability. But throughout, there is insistence on the fact that the highest values are transnational and truly universal.

Vivekananda does not accept the hypothesis that the institution of caste in India is linked with Hindu religion. He says in one place that in religion there is no caste. Moreover, the truth can be learnt even from the lowest individual, without caring for his caste and creed. It is not the monopoly of any one. The caste system is opposed to the religion of Vedanta. Pointing out the fatal mistake of the social reformers of India, he says, "Beginning from Buddha down to Rammohan Roy, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste all together, and failed."52

Shankara in the introduction to his commentary on *the Bhagvad-Gita*, says that it is the twofold Vedic religion of work and renunciation (pravrtti-dharma and nivrtti-dharma) that maintains order in the universe. This religion, which directly leads to liberation and worldly prosperity, has long been practised by all castes and religious orders (varna-asrama) who sought welfare. It should, however, be pointed out clearly that, while the Vedic religion certainly sought to bring worldly goods and joy for man, it was never hedonistic either in form or in content. Its aim has been always the spiritual perfection of man. Worldly prosperity was to be pursued within "the framework of 'catur-varga' for the four values of dharma, artha, kama and moksha."53 The framers of this scheme of life had a profound insight into the workings of human nature, and provided for the satisfaction and sublimation of the deep urges that lurk in human beings.

The economic value (*artha*) and the psycho-biological value (*kama*) are to be pursued under restraint, and that pursuit is hedged between dharma, on the one side, and *moksa*, on the other. *Artha* and *kama* are to be gained on the basis of dharma, with an eye towards
moksa as the highest goal to be achieved. The river of artha and kama must flow between the banks of dharma and moksa and it must never be allowed to overflow or cause any breach. The moral value (dharma) and the spiritual value (moksa) must always guard and guide the economic value (artha) and the psycho-biological value (kama). That is why dharma was conceived as a dynamic moral force that upheld society together by prescribing duties and functions for one and all. Artha and kama are necessary for a happy life, but they must be acquired through dharma. The moral value is placed higher than the economic and the psycho-biological. The latter two must be subservient and never run counter to the former. A steadfast pursuit of dharma is difficult. It is of such human frailty and shortsightedness that the great Vyasa speaks, when he says:

Here I am crying with uplifted arms that dharma brings with it both artha and kama, but none listens to me.54

Moksa or spiritual realization, which is the fourth varga or value, is the ultimate goal that is sought to be achieved by the other three values. Man should be free after acquiring knowledge about the truth of himself and the world. The spiritual unfolding of man is not an event that happens all of a sudden, or at specified time and place. It is a progressive manifestation of divinity corresponding to the acquisition and perfection of its pre-requisites; it is a conscious and continuous effort at pursuing a way of life, and steadily uncovering the layers that hide the divine essence of the soul of man—a gradual unfolding of the purity, perfection, freedom, and consciousness of the eternal soul.

Vivekananda was very critical of Hindus in this respect. He says, "The paths of knowledge, devotion and Yoga -- all have gone, and now there remains only that of don’t touchism -- Don't touch me."55 Thus he pointed out that, which is not Hinduism. It is in none of our books. It is simply an orthodox superstition -- a great hinderance in the advancement of Indian society. It is a form of mental disease. He reminded his countrymen, “All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction, love is, therefore, the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying.”56 He laid emphasis on the positive cultivation of the religious spirit of self-realization and self-abnegation. But how? His answer is, "The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher."57 He calls for a synthesis of the high and the low for an organized society. He poignantly asserts, “The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal at the other end is the Chandela and the whole work is to raise the Chandela up to the Brahmin."58
Vivekananda like Aristotle was a believer in moderation with regard to social change. He was of the view that social customs are the result of the arrangement of society for self-preservation. In due course, they might become a cause of the decadence of society. The best way to get rid of them is to remove the process which is responsible for the development of those customs. Mere denunciation and condemnation create unnecessary social tension and antagonism, and are not of much avail. He did not favour the use of violent methods, such as are used by foreign societies. He stood for organic and slow growth. He says, "We must grow according to our nature. Vain is it to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have engrafted upon us, it is impossible"\textsuperscript{59}

Vivekananda's approach on this point is quite rational. He points out that every nation, as it is today, is the result of the thousand years of karma behind her. They have their own traditions behind them. So is the case with us. Hence we cannot follow them. We cannot become westerners. Therefore, imitating the west is useless. Vivekananda's observation seems to be true because it is not only difficult but impossible for Indians to throw off their ancient culture which has survived through scores of centuries.

Vivekananda knew that social stratification was also found in other parts of the world. But the basic distinction between Indian social system and that of other countries is, "In every other country the highest honour belongs to the Kshatriya the man of the sword. In India the highest honour, however belongs to the man of peace -- 'the Brahmana the man of God.'\textsuperscript{60} Hence the head of Indian society is not the warrior, but the scholar, the intellectually high and spiritually sublime wise-man the Brahmana, literally, is one whose refuge is Brahmana -- the Absolute. Thus the institution of caste puts, theoretically at least, "The whole of India under the guidance-not of wealth, nor the sword-but of intellect, intellect chastened and controlled by spirituality."\textsuperscript{61} The second fundamental distinction between the Indian social system and those of the others is that in other societies, the unit is the individual, while in India the unit is the whole caste community.

3.2 Concept of Culture

Culture is the psychological cultivation of the mind, which yields values that govern human behaviour and human relations. Thus culture is the culturing or cultivation of human mind. It is that psychological process of mental organization by which the fundamental, innate, inherited elements of the mind are built round objects and persons. Vivekananda has pointed out the difference between culture and civilization and their relation with knowledge.
He says, "It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge."\textsuperscript{62} From this statement, it logically follows that a nation may have a large reservoir of knowledge but no culture because, in spite of knowledge as Vivekananda points out, "they are like tigers; they are like savages, because culture is not there."\textsuperscript{63} Vivekananda further pointed out, "Knowledge is only skin-deep as civilization is, and a little scratch brings out the old savage."\textsuperscript{64} That is why Vivekananda emphasizes time and again that Indian masses should develop and reinforce. He feels, "To the Brahmans I appeal that they must work hard to raise the Indian people... by giving out the culture that they accumulated for centuries."\textsuperscript{65}

Vivekananda had an intimate knowledge of the western civilization as well as of the Indian culture based on spirituality. On the basis of this intense knowledge he developed an insight into the future of Indian polity. He convincingly remarked, "Everything goes to show that socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, is coming on the boards."\textsuperscript{66} At another place, he again remarked:

Yet a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class, with their Shudrahood; that is to say, not like that as at present, when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaisya or Ksatriya; but a time will come when the Shudras of every country, with their inborn Shudra nature and habits -- not becoming in essence Vaisya or Ksatriya, but remaining as Shudras -- will gain absolute supremacy in every society.\textsuperscript{67}

He pointed out that the Shudras had worked so long uniformly like machines guided by human intelligence and the clever educated section had taken the substantial part of the fruit of their labour. He said:

They have no chance; no escape no way to climb up... They sink lower every day; they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society and they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men.\textsuperscript{68}

But the day was not far off when they would attain power and establish their own supremacy and be rulers.

Vivekananda argued that whether the leadership of society be in the hands of those who monopolize learning or yield the power of riches or arms, the source of its power is always the subject masses. They are the backbone of the country, because they produce all
wealth and food. They will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, and more food. The present system of distribution of wealth makes the poor poorer and the rich richer.

Vivekananda held that not only were the upper classes of India responsible for exploiting the poor masses, but also they helped the British imperialism in strengthening the foundation of a foreign political and economic system because that system; in its turn, permitted them to practise oppression on their less fortunate brethren. He poured forth all his suppressed venom and deep resentment against these so-called upper classes in the following memorable words:

You, the upper classes of India, do you think you are alive? It is among those whom your ancestors despised as `walking carrion', that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real 'walking Corpses'... You merge yourselves in the void and disappear, and let `New India' arise in your place.  

Thus, Vivekananda castigates the upper classes for their exploitative tendencies and snobbery. He lionizes the downtrodden who have the potential to expedite the emergence of `New India'. He asserts, “Let her arise-out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough... Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory from marts; and from markets. Let her emerge from groves; and forests from hills and mountains.” To Vivekananda, “The Indian social order is but the reflex of the infinite universal Motherhood the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler; the sweeper are its flesh and blood.” And his exhortation was, "Serve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, the weak." Developing the idea further, he says, "...rich men ...are merely the ornaments, the decorations of the country. It is the millions of poor lower class people who are its life. The only hope of India is from the masses. The upper classes are physically and morally dead."

These observations convincingly revealed that Vivekananda earnestly and passionately felt that the renascent India would be based on the solid foundations of the “common people”. Hence he insisted for giving all facilities to the poor. He said, "If the Brahmin has more aptitude for learning on the ground of heredity than the Pariah, spend no more money on the Brahmin's education; but spend all on the Pariah. Give to the weak, `for
there all the gift is needed... Our poor people, these downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are.”

To Vivekananda, socialism was only the means and not an end in itself. The present condition of India was the effect, and the cause lay in the tyranny of the upper classes. Hence he suggested that it was the duty of the upper classes to suck up their own poison and help the poor by giving them culture. Hence, he believed that the cause must be removed, the effect would automatically be wiped out. The modern trend seemed to believe that socialism could be imposed on the people but this approach was contrary to the principle of growth or evolutionary process. A socialist state or society could not be manufactured over-night. Society was an organism not a machine. It must grow. Gandhi is of the same view that a new social order cannot be forced that would be a remedy worse than the disease.

Why did Vivekananda place all his hopes on the poor toiling millions? Was it because they constituted the overwhelming majority of the nation? It was not the only reason. They were toilers; they created all the wealth of society. They were deprived of what they produced for long. But when this alienation reached its limit, then, by the very laws of development of society, the deprived, deprived the depriver, the expropriator was expropriated. Unlike western socialists he neither believed in the elimination of private enterprise, nor in the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production to prevent exploitation of the poor by the rich in the society. His approach to the solution of social and political problems was moral and not economic.

Unlike Communists and the Syndicalists, Vivekananda did not believe in using violent and revolutionary methods for the quick overthrow of the capitalist system. He insisted that permanent results could never be achieved through this method because there was no end to violence and hatred. As we could not squeeze oil from sand, so peace could never be achieved through violence. Hence, this method could never be accepted as the permanent basis of peace. The only method for achieving harmony and peace in society was the method of ‘love’ and persuasion.

Vivekananda's conception of an ideal society was a society in which diversity of capacity and occupation would remain, but in which privilege would be totally unknown. All this required a root-and-branch reform, but he believed that such reform could not come through a revolution based on force. It could be ushered in only through evolution based on culture and mutual esteem. Thus his motto was, "From caste to socialism through culture."
Vivekananda did not think that socialism was a perfect system and that it would cure all parochialism by liberating the masses and diverting their attention to more active cooperation in the fields of industry and commerce. In his opinion, the economic approach to socialism would not do much. It should not be divorced from culture. Hence he put emphasis on cultural equality and advocated evolution and not revolution. According to Vivekananda true approach to the solution of social problems lay in following the path of progressive reduction of inequalities. While making it clear that manipulation in the physical world, however clever, could not lead to an ultimate solution of human problems, he advocated socialism of the 'leveling-up' variety, and not that of the 'leveling-down' variety. Unfortunately, we saw that many misguided fanatics more readily took to the 'levelling-down' type. On the other hand, Vivekananda's `socialism' did not require pulling down those at the top and equalizing them with those at the bottom, but helping the least and the lowest to rise higher and higher till all were equal at the `top'.

So according to Vivekananda whether it concerned wealth or possessions, social positions or educational opportunities, the temptation to pull down and equalize, the temptation to seek hasty short-cuts, must be resisted. And an honest, intense desire to uplift others to the `top' must be backed up by appropriate action, `calm, silent and steady work'. A prime necessity was to discourage jealousy towards those who were better placed and more gifted than ourselves, and the reprehensible attitude of grabbing others’ honest earnings, through force or political scheming and legal tricks. It was difficult to say how Vivekananda arrived at this conclusion. May be, his first hand knowledge of the condition of the exploited masses of India, of the deprivation of the native princes, his contact with the most advanced western societies and their social thinking led him logically to this conclusion. But his conviction and utterance sounded prophetic.

Vivekananda was fully convinced that the peasant, the shoe-maker, the sweeper, and such other lower classes of India had much greater capacity for work and self-reliance than upper classes. Addressing the upper classes, he again said, "Very soon they will get above you in position... You have so long oppressed these forbearing masses; now is the time for their retribution." Vivekananda further warned them that times had changed. In every country, "The lower classes are gradually awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, determined to exact their legitimate dues. The masses of Europe and America have been the first to awaken and have already begun the fight. Signs of this awakening have shown themselves in India, too, as is evident from the number of strikes among the lower
classes now-a-days. The upper classes will no longer be able to repress the lower, try they ever so much.”

Vivekananda fully realized that it was labour that created all wealth, and it were these very creators who were deprived of the fruits of their labour. From this, it could be safely concluded that he was among the very few Indians of his time who understood the social significance of labour. On the other hand, he was convinced that if proper atmosphere and opportunity were given to the toilers, they would be capable of the highest intellectual activity. He remarked that a number of geniuses are sure to arise from among them. He was quite sure unless this wide gulf between the lower and the upper classes was made up, there was no hope for any well-being for the people In spite of his sympathy for the poor and contempt for the upper classes he laid ultimate emphasis on spirituality. He once said about his ideal that he held, “My ideal indeed, can be put into a few words and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every moment of life.”

In addition to the abolition of priest craft and privilege, Vivekananda laid stress on the change of attitudes of the masses and upper classes. Strife would not help either; it would degrade both. The lower classes would not rise by leveling down upper classes; their real destiny lay in raising them selves up spiritually and culturally. It was no use simply blaming others; they had to exert themselves and imbibe the qualities that made others great.

According to Vivekananda, socialism, even if brought about, without this spiritual uplift, would not last. He said, "What guarantee, have we that this or any civilization will last unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man?" His stand was that though the people had to be fed and their standard of living had to be raised, this was not to be achieved at the cost of religious besides he found no incompatibility between social progress and spiritual advancement. He wanted the masses to rise with their spiritual heritage intact. He said, "Can you give them (the masses) their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature?" His motto was “Elevation of the masses without injuring their religioon.” He was firmly convinced that religion could play an active role in uplifting the masses.

### 3.3 Concept of Civilization

Vivekananda prophesied the resurrection of the orient and the coming in of a social upheaval. He is reported to have said:
...this rising of the Shudras will take place first in Russia, and then in China. India will rise next and will play a vital role in shaping the future world.\textsuperscript{81}

He also said, "Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifteen years, if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life."\textsuperscript{82}

Though Vivekananda did not believe in the theory of 'class struggle', that the higher and the lower classes are ever antagonistic to each other, and that the lower classes can hope to raise themselves only by fighting for their rights, he did not deny such a possibility, and foresaw that the Shudras would assert themselves with their Shudrahood, unless the higher classes helped them to imbibe higher culture and occupy a position of equality with the Brahmanas. Vivekananda was of the view that it is not necessary that the rise of the Shudras should happen through strife, or that the higher cultural values should be pulled down in the process. The ideal in every society is the Brahmana, and the effort everywhere should be to raise all to the position of the Brahmanahood and not to bring down all to the level of the Shudrahood. Thus he called upon the Brahmins to work hard to raise the Indian masses by giving them culture which they have accumulated for centuries and to the non-Brahmin castes he asked to wait and refrain fighting the Brahmin, because they were suffering from their own fault. He advised, “Not to waste their energies in vain discussions and quarrels in the newspapers; but make use of all their energies in acquiring the culture which the Brahmin has."\textsuperscript{83} To him, “The correct solution was not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher.”\textsuperscript{84}

Naturally, Vivekananda's method differs from the well-known socialistic or communistic approaches. And yet he declared, "I am a socialist," though he added at the same time, “Not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.... A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same persons having pains and pleasures.”\textsuperscript{85} In fact Vivekananda did not pay any attention to the economic or political aspects of either socialism or communism; he was really concerned with their cultural bearings and spiritual implications. He did, of course, say, "All the members of a society ought, to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education, or knowledge."\textsuperscript{86} He also added at the same time:
Freedom in all matters, i.e. advance towards Mukti, is the worthiest gain of man.... Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious.\textsuperscript{87}

These principles are more in accord with democracy than with other systems which stand not only for equality of opportunity, but for equality in other respects as well. Yet, socialism appealed to Vivekananda because of its active sympathy for the poor. Irrespective of the merit or demerit of socialism or communism, he used those terms entirely in a sense of his own. Their stress on equality appealed to him since it approximated to his own Vedantic conception of society.

Vivekananda pointed out, " Asiatic civilization began on the plains near large rivers. Hence the original foundation of all Asiatic civilization is agriculture and in all of them divine nature predominates. Most of the European civilization on the other hand, originated either in hilly countries or on the sea-coast–piracy and robbery form the basis of this civilization; there non-divine nature is predominant."\textsuperscript{88} Making the distinction between two civilizations more clear, he says, "The European civilization may be likened to a piece of cloth... its loom is a vast temperate hilly country on the sea shore, its cotton, a strong warlike mongrel race formed by the internixture of various races, its warp is welfare in defence of one's self and one's religion ...Its woof is commerce. The means to its civilization is the sword, its auxiliary-courage and strength, its aim–enjoyment here and hereafter."\textsuperscript{89} On the contrary, "The loom of the fabric of the Aryan civilization is a vast, warm, level country, interspersed with broad, navigable rivers. The cotton of this cloth is composed of highly civilized, semi-civilized and barbarian tribes, mostly Aryans. Its warp is Varanshramachara and its woof, the conquest of strife and competition in nature."\textsuperscript{90} Referring to the aims of European and Aryan civilizations he said, “While the former sought to ensure its survival at the cost of all others, the Aryans aimed at raising all to their own level, nay even to a higher level than themselves."\textsuperscript{91} The means in both civilizations are different. Vivekananda points out, "The means of European civilization is the sword, of the Aryans, the division into different Varnas (natural caste)."\textsuperscript{92} Another difference between the two civilizations is, "In Europe, it is everywhere victory to the strong, and death to the weak, In the land of Bharat, every social rule is for the protection of the weak."\textsuperscript{93}

Vivekananda dreamt of a harmonious combination of the two cultures to make an ideal human society. He opines, "Each will have to supply and hand down to future generations what it has, for the future accomplishment of that dream of ages--the harmony of
nations, an ideal world."94 A complete civilization needs a suitable blending of the two elements. Although he denounced, “…the drinking carelessly of those decoctions of Western materialism with an Eastern flavour.”95 still he believes, “in making a European society with India's religion,”96 He called for a synthesis of Western materialism and Eastern spiritualism. He professes, "By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of the East, much can be accomplished."97 He asked social reformers "to unite in themselves the culture of both the East and the West."98 Vivekananda was not an impatient reformer. "Help" and not "condemn" was his watchword. He was of the opinion, ""The Westerners should be seen through their eyes; to see them through our eyes, and for them to see us with theirs—both these are mistakes."99 Again a fruit-tree must be judged by the best it can produce, and not by the worm-eaten, undeveloped fruits. Each society has its own part to play, and each has its specific contribution. His conclusion is "My message in life is to ask the East and West not to quarrel over different ideals but to show them that the goal is the same in both cases, however, opposite it may appear. As we mend our way through this mazy vale of life let us bid each other godspeed."100

During the last three hundred years, the human mind, disciplined in the methods of science, has gained increasing knowledge of the mysteries of nature and has controlled its powers. His voyage to the moon bears testimony to this fact. The credit goes to Einstein who discovered that energy contained in a piece of matter is equal to its mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light i.e. E=MC^2. The aim of the scientists has always been the alleviation of human misery and enhancement of human happiness and welfare through the advancement of science and technology. Undoubtedly, a part of it is being invested to enhance human life but the rest of it is being invested in preparation for the destruction of human civilization itself. There is evidence of a spirit of heartlessness, absence of compassion, or absence of, what Sorokin calls altruism, in modern civilization which has knowledge and power, but not wisdom: This wisdom is the product of knowledge and power chastened and purified by compassion and the sense of human responsibility.

Another impact of science on society is that it developed a one sided view of life i.e. external happiness. It has totally ignored the internal aspect which is the real source of happiness for the individual. With the growth of materialistic civilization the faith in religion and spiritual values has been shattered.

Added to this was the attack on religion from the great social idealists and revolutionary social thinkers like Karl Marx, who characterized religion as the `soul of
soulless conditions, the heart of a heartless world, the opium of the people.’ The result was that, by the end of the nineteenth century, religion and faith in God and eternal verities ceased to be the ruling ideas of modern civilization. Modern science treated religion as a dangerous error in the beginning and as a harmless illusion in the end.

But the two great world wars and the various crises-economic and political-that followed the one and preceded the other in this twentieth century, made even great scientists feel and say that science, as understood and pursued by them, was not enough. Einstein said that Science can denature plutonium; but it cannot denature the evil in the heart of man. That is not its function. Most scientists agree today that science alone cannot ensure human happiness; it can only create conditions for his happiness. That is the province of another discipline, the science of the inner nature of man, which is the true meaning of religion as understood in Indian thought.

Before his departure for America, Vivekananda knew that the whole of Western Culture was permeated and dominated by the scientific attitude. It was deemed essential for any idea to strike roots into that culture that must satisfy the requirements of science. The genius of Vivekananda lies in explaining Vedanta in the terminology of science and showing that the conclusions reached by modern science are exactly the same as have already been reached by the Vedanta philosophy. He himself admitted that he had a message to the West as Buddha had to the East. He further prophesied, "Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friendly. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples."

In industrial societies, social relations at present are tending to be highly individualistic. People meet each other not as partners of a well functioning organism, each performing a definite function in the society but as highly egoistic individuals, who recognize no relations except the relations of the market place and no morality except the morality of self-interest in which the interest of the society as a whole is more often than not thrown to the winds.

The distrust of the social organization is increasing rapidly in industrial societies. Instead of finding an articulation of his will in the will of society, the individual discovers that society as such is destructive of his individuality. An organization which lacks stability and cohesiveness of a social organism is standing on the foundations of sand. It is like a house of cards and might fall any moment. No amount of political reform would achieve
anything unless the society, of which the state is only an organ, is built upon solid foundations. The state machinery with its good as well as its bad points just reflects the good or bad points of its society. And, therefore, the question of the type of social organization that the state should have in order to sustain it in sound health assumes a vital importance.

Plato in his *Republic* rightly treats the individual as a part of an order -- an order in which he performs an appointed function. But he oversimplifies the problem by basing his conception of man on the naive conception of human psychology. He ignores the true relationship between individual and society. In Plato's society only one aspect of the individual's mind is allowed to grow, while all the rest stagnate.

Vivekananda at last succeeded in explaining to the West that Indian social organization is the most stable of all the social organizations. It can be practical also, as it is based on the concept of `Universal Law' which is a principle of harmony and as such seeks to harmonise the discrepant elements in individual as well as in social life. Man is both social and egoistic. Individual life is a balance between his social instinct and animal passions. The first drives him toward cooperative endeavour while the other becomes responsible for all that is undesirable in him. Both things alternate, sometimes the first dominates, at other times the latter. Universal law seeks to maintain the balance between all such forces of society so that anti-social impulses of a few might not be able to disturb its peace and play havoc with its foundations. If in a society anti-social impulses of individuals get the better of social impulses and the latter begin to languish, anarchy is bound to overtake the society. Therefore, it is of the highest importance that the social organisation must take into account this important aspect of human personality. It must seek to infuse this universal law into the life of society.

It is necessary that there is a proper combination in society of the best wisdom, the highest valour, sufficient wealth and also ample leisure. In the absence of such a combination, it would be difficult to create a harmonious and at the same time, a vigorous social order. Vivekananda like ancient Indian thinkers, also realised this and therefore, he argues that corresponding to these four functions in society there should be four classes-the first gives the best of wisdom to society, the second is entrusted with the task of protection and governance, the third enables the society to have a full supply of material goods and the fourth performs menial work and provides sufficient leisure to other classes to devote themselves to the duties laid on all the four classes to mind their own business, to perform the
duties of their own station and not to meddle with the affairs of other classes. The principle of self-control which was applicable to all the classes secured necessary harmony between them. Thus in the beginning, the now much despised Varnashram or the caste system was a functional division of society, working almost on the principle of spiritual unity of all the four classes. Besides, it was also an excellent mechanism of social adjustment. But gradually vested interests arose and became powerful and the system degenerated into a closed society. Today, it has been reduced to merely a mechanical arrangement in which there is all emphasis on the form, but the spirit has been lost. Moreover, industrialization has radically transformed the character of society. The advent of industrial civilization has thrown the whole society into a melting pot. Today no state can claim to be self-sufficient. Gone are the days of a calm and serene life which once characterized the life in Indian villages when each Indian village was self-sufficient and a republic by itself in miniature. A new society is fast developing in the wake of industrial civilization. The totality of war requires total mobilization of a nation’s resources and this in turn again adds to the complexity of social institutions.
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