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MY TURN

High Culture First!

Civilization's developments are only a shell

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Today we have huge cities with multi-storied buildings and dense populations. But in the ancient days of India we were proud of our rustic tapovanas (places of austerity). The ashrams of rishis like Rishi Valmiki, Guru Vashishta, Vishwa Mitra, Panch Wati, etc., were famous. In those days there were also relatively big cities, but they were surrounded by forests, where the rishis were busy in meditation. That was a sanskriti (culture) different from the civilization of the cities. It is a matter of regret that today's people in this modern and scientific world feel shy about referring to our rishis as civilized, simply because their needs were minimal. True, they wore unstitched, coarse cloth and ate wild fruits and vegetables, but their blessings reach out across infinity. I think it is imperative that we discriminate carefully between the modern development of so-called civilization and true culture.

While one may choose to say that these rishis were not as civilized as we are today, still, no God-fearing person can deny the fact that they were cultured. Civilization is a body, and

culture is its soul. Civilization is an external manifestation, whereas culture is internal. Civilization as a development from stone huts to marbled houses is a mere rearrangement of our life in the material world. Cultural development, on the other hand, arises from faith in God. Railroads, television, faxes, computers, nuclear weapons, etc., may represent civilization, but not culture. Truth/untruth, honesty/dishonesty, contentment/discontentment, restraint/lack of restraint are the real definitions of a high or low culture.

Suppose a person is rich and lives in a luxurious house, has servants, cars, television and other comforts, but is a liar, dishonest, drunkard, characterless. He may be called civilized but not cultured. If we want to call him cultured, then we can call it a low culture. Rishi Vishwa Mitra lived in a forest hut. Lord Rama used a horse chariot as transportation. Perhaps their standard of living could be deemed lower than a rich businessman who wears silk clothes and travels by air. But in my opinion Rishi Vishwa Mitra represented the higher culture.

A developed country which has all amenities and facilities, whose people respect and love truth, honesty and celibacy, enjoys a high civilization and culture. It is also possible that a so-called "highly developed, civilized" nation, gifted with the latest inventions, may in fact be a nation of the lowest culture if its people abuse the facilities, using cars and telephones for robbery, TV for naked dancing and advertisements for alcohol.

Conversely, a country may not be developed by the standards of modern civilization, yet in fact the country may be of a much higher standard in terms of culture if the people of that

country share each others sorrows, serve others at their own cost, help the needy, sick and down-trodden and stay away from untruth and dishonesty. Perhaps some of its people move in bullock carts instead of cars, live in huts instead of air conditioned houses. If you wish to call such a country uncivilized, fine, but it is blessed with a higher culture. Every person of that country is a proud citizen. The people of other countries must bow their head before that country's culture.

To say the obvious: among civilizations it is those with a higher culture that should hold the place of prestige in the eyes of mankind and our youth. A country may need rail, TV and aeroplanes, but it cannot survive without truth, honesty and patriotism. Civilization can be sacrificed for culture, but culture must not be sacrificed for civilization. The soul may live without a body but the body cannot survive without a soul. A country is lucky if it is blessed with both civilization and culture. But let us consider what is real civilization and put maintenance of a high culture first and so-called modern development second.

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