

# INDIA'S COMPOSITE CULTURE

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Culture is basically a social concept. When individuals or communities share their lives between them, culture spontaneously emerges. That is to say, culture is necessarily a composite culture. This fact applies to the entire human society in general and to India in particular.

Legends have it that there was a king called Mahabali who ruled the region of Kerala in ancient times. In his territory, all human beings were equal. There was no poverty or sickness. People were healthy, wealthy, prosperous and happy. His kingdom was known for 'good governance' on account of the wellbeing that prevailed then.

The memory of Mahabali is celebrated as Onam, a festival of prosperity, on a yearly basis. What is exceptionally notable about Onam is that Hindus, Christians and Muslims celebrate it together, whether they are in Kerala, in other parts of the country or abroad. As Mahabali was a powerful example of composite culture, so is Onam a powerful symbol of togetherness.

In the context of the entire country, sublime ideals like 'one world one family, truth is one the wise call it diverse, let noble thoughts come from all directions, let all be happy' compose the spinal cord of the composite culture of the country. What is required is that these ideals are translated into lived realities.

The existence of India as a nation is the most vibrant example of composite culture. Several cultures and traditions have contributed to the making of India. The tribal, Dravidian and Aryan cultures have been in this geographical area for millennia. Even before the Christian era the Jain and Buddhist traditions were present in India.

From the Christian era, slightly before and slightly after it too, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities found their space in India. Later, Zoroastrian, Sikh and Bahá'í also became part of the country. All the above communities have played their significant share in making India. Even the Mughalese and the British who came to rule over the country contributed to making of this nation in a significant manner.

In addition, India is not the construct of any particular group. Valmiki and Dr Ambedkar from the so called low caste communities gifted to this country the epic of Ramayan and the Constitution of India respectively. In the same way, prominent individuals from diverse communities, like Tata and Birla, contributed to the making of India, in diverse areas, as well.

What follows from this outline is that no community in India has any right to consider the country as its private property. All the communities that have contributed to the making of this country and to all the citizens present in the country right now have equal right over the country. India belongs to all of them. Composite culture affirms this truth in a manner beyond question.

Moreover, diversities in India are so many that no country in the world can compete with it. The political world with various national and regional parties is a Himalayan example for schools of thought, so much so that if one would learn political ways and varieties one should perhaps learn from India.

In the same way, India has a rich variety of geographical landscapes, climatic conditions, ideologies, cultures, religious traditions, social mores, food habits, dress patterns, artistic expressions, etc, which defies

comparison to any geographical region in the world. All these are vibrant examples for our composite culture.

The Constitution of India could be considered one of the best Constitutions of the world. Some of the finest values of human life are inherent in the ideals of secularism and democracy. Equality, respect, dignity, justice, cooperation, and the like, are at the core of human culture. The values of the Constitution reflect the motivating imperative of composite culture.

It is obvious that the human society is limited and can never be perfect. All communities and nations have short-comings and problems, from time immemorial. Those maladies will be part of human life, in some way or other, too. But, when problems increase beyond a measure, social life is sure to slip into chaos and shatter beyond repair.

Since some time, certain mischievous elements seem to be hyper-active in our country. As part of their foul design, autocratic attempts are being made for weakening the spirit of democracy and for suppressing the rights of the citizens. Some appear to enslave people to their network by being intolerant of the voices of freedom.

Besides, some forces exert ownership over the country and try to play the role of a contractor for the country. Some try to conduct acid tests for the citizens in patriotism and distribute certificates to that effect. Some volunteer to provide citizens even with passports and visa to countries of their choice, when their whims and fancies are resented. Some dare to make un-parliamentary and irresponsible statements in public.

Moreover, some elements are bent on breaking and dividing the country along the lines of groups of their choice. They increase the distance between communities by propagating hatred among them. Some attack other communities and weaken their self-confidence, by destroying their property and even killing persons based on fabricated allegations. Some engage in fanaticism, hooliganism, cunningness, lie, street behavior, etc for gaining power and money.

Consequently, the social harmony and balance are being disturbed. False notions and confusion seem to increase in the country. The relationship among communities gets weakened. The golden heritage of composite culture of the country seems to break up. This diabolic phenomenon is the greatest threat to the unity and integrity of the country and is in fact suicidal. Adult and enlightened citizens require getting awakened and united, in favour of maintaining the composite fibre of India as a nation.

I have two suggestions for strengthening the composite culture of the country. One, people of all communities have to visit places of worship of other religions, celebrate festivals together, make effort learn the language of the other and learn good values from other traditions. This will remove the sense of unsociability with regard to what the other holds on to and achieve we-feeling and national solidarity, which could be the strength for a brighter future.

Two, a preferential attention has to be paid to the disadvantaged sections of our country. It is like filling the gutters first while at the process of making roads. It has to be ensured that women enjoy half the social space of our country and are empowered to shoulder responsibilities for making the country better. It has also to be ensured that more than half of the younger generation of the country has their share of participation in making the country and gets the right sense of direction in life.

In addition, a strong and special step also has to be taken in favour of the least, the last and the lost of our country. There has to be planned efforts to ensure food, shelter, clothing and dignity to those who live below poverty line. Those pushed to the margins, even to the roads and streets, require being brought to the mainstream of life. This country belongs to those have-nots as much it belongs to the haves. Only when this happens, the composite culture will be complete and strong.

As a matter of fact, composite culture is a culture of 'taking all along' and 'harmonious living with one and all'. As the first line of the Hindi film 'Zameer' goes, 'hum bhee chalein, tum bhee chalo, chalee rahe zindagee'. Just like the garden that is composed of flowers, grasses, bushes and trees, people of all traditions and communities have to stay in this country. The country needs all of them, as the garden needs all of them, too. Like the kingdom of Mahabali, each of them has to enjoy its own sacred space, dignity and opportunities to blossom up.

The golden sentiment of 'vasudhaikutumbakam' is the privilege of the one who is genuinely 'udaarcharitaanaam'. Hearts and minds of people have to open up beyond the divide of high and low as well as mine and of others. The citizens of our great nation are called upon to do his or her homework of imbibing the spirit of one's own faith and come out to engage together in making the 'family of God', where every other is a friend and companion in life. Composite culture is still in the process of being made and the country has miles and miles to travel towards this sublime ideal.

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