

THE HERITAGE OF INDIA



Ram Mohan Roy had sounded the theme with his passionate advocacy of social reform: Vivekananda repeated it with a more nationalist timbre, when he declared that the highest form of service of the Great Mother was social service. Other great Indians chief of who was Mahatma Gandhi developed the theme of social service as a religious duty and the development continues under Gandhi's successors.

Mahatma Gandhi was looked on by many, both Indian and European, as the epitome of Hindu tradition, but this is a false judgement for he was much influenced by Western ideas. Gandhi believed in the fundamentals of his ancient culture, but his passionate love of the underdog and his antipathy to caste though not unprecedented in ancient India, were unorthodox in the extreme, and owed more to European 19th century liberalism than to anything Indian. His faith in non-violence was, as we have seen by no means typical of Hinduism—his predecessor in revolt, the able Maratha Brahman B.G. Tilak, and Gandhi's impatient lieutenant Subhas Chandra Bose were far more orthodox in this respect. For Gandhi's pacifism we must look to the Sermon on the Mount and to Tolstoy. His championing of women's right is also the result of Western influence. In his social context he was always rather an innovator than a conservative. He succeeded in shifting the whole emphasis of Hindu thought towards a popular and equalitarian social order, in place of the hierarchy of class and caste. Following up the work of many less well known 19th century reformers Gandhi and his followers of the Indian National Congress have given new orientation and new life to Hindu culture, after centuries of stagnation.

Today there are few Indians, whatever their creed, who do not look back with pride on their ancient culture, and there are few intelligent Indians who are not willing to sacrifice some of its effete elements so that India may develop and progress. Politically and economically India faces many problems of great difficulty, and no one can forecast her future with any certainty. But it is safe to predict that, whatever the future may be, the Indians of coming generations will not be unconvincing and self-conscious copies of Europeans, but will be men rooted in their traditions, and aware of the continuity of their culture. Already, after only seven years of independence, the extremes of national self-denigration and fanatical cultural chauvinism are disappearing. We believe that Hindu civilization is in the act of performing its most spectacular feat of synthesis. In the past it has received, adapted and digested elements of many different cultures Indo-European, Mesopotamian, Iranian, Greek, Roman, Scythian, Turkish,

Persian and Arab. With each new influence it has somewhat changed. Now it is well on the way to assimilating the culture of the West.

Hindu civilization will, we believe, retain its continuity. The Bhagavad Gita will not cease to inspire men of action, and the Upanishads, men of thought. The charm and graciousness of the Indian way of life will continue, however, much affected it may be by the labour-saving devices of the West. People will still love the tales of the heroes of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and of the loves of Dushyanta and Shakuntala and Pururavas and Urvashi. The quiet and gentle happiness which has at all times pervaded Indian life where oppression, disease and poverty have not overclouded. It will surely not vanish before the more hectic ways of the West.

Much that was useless in ancient Indian culture has already perished. The extravagant and barbarous hecatombs of the Vedic age have long since been forgotten, though animal sacrifice continues in some sects. Widows have long ceased to be burnt on their husband's pyres. Girls may not by law be married in childhood. In buses and trains all over India Brahmans rub shoulders with the lowest castes without consciousness of grave pollution and the temples are open to all by law. Caste is vanishing; the process began long ago, but its pace is now so rapid that the more objectionable features of caste may have disappeared within a generation or so. The old family system is adapting itself to present-day conditions. In fact the whole face of India is altering, but the cultural tradition continues, and it will never be lost.

- **A. L. Basham**

About the Essay

'The Heritage of India' has been extracted from *The Wonder That Was India*. Here the writer makes it clear that Indian culture is all-inclusive. It assimilates foreign cultures in itself, so its tradition will ever remain intact.

The essay is written by A. L. Basham, an eminent personality in the field of history and cultural studies. His writings reveal many important aspects of Indian culture and history.

GLOSSARY

heritage	: something passed on by or inherited from an earlier generation
advocacy	: argue for
timbre	: tone
the Great Mother	: Bharat Mata (India)

epitome	: someone or something that shows to a great degree, a quality
fundamentals	: basic principles
underdog	: victim of social and political injustice; downtrodden
antipathy	: dislike, aversion
unprecedented	: without example, something never done before
liberalism	: an ideology that expounds freedom, progress, liberty and dignity of man
Sermon on the Mount : preaching of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 5-7	
champion	: defend and support
innovator	: a person who introduces new things
conservative	: a person who is against changes in society; orthodox
colleague	: co-worker
hierarchy	: the organization of a system into higher and lower ranks
orientation	: direction
stagnation	: becoming dull or sluggish, inactive
creed	: religious belief
effete elements	: weaknesses
forecast	: say in advance, foretell, predict
self-denigration	: self-condemnation
fanatical cultural chauvinism: strong unreasoned enthusiasm for cultural glory	
disappearing	: vanishing
spectacular feat of	: astonishing ability to combine separate elements
synthesis	: elements
adapted	: made fit, made suitable
assimilating	: taking in, absorbing

pervaded	: spread through
oppression	: cruelty, harshness
overclouded it	: affected it much
hectic ways	: pattern of life which is full of excitement
perished	: passed away, died
barbarous	: uncivilized
hecatombs	: public sacrifices
sect	: group of people united by religious beliefs
sacrifice	: immolation
cease	: check, stop
pyre	: large pile of wood for burning a dead body
rub shoulders with	: meet and mix with
consciousness	: awareness
grave pollution	: great loss of purity
pace	: speed

Activity 1: COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative:

- The essay 'The Heritage of India' has been extracted from-

(a) The Wonder that was India	(b) United India
(c) Divided India	(d) India of People's Hope
- The essay 'The Heritage of India' clarifies that Indian culture is-

(a) all-inclusive	(b) non-assimilatory
(c) inherited	(d) wonderful

B. Answer the following questions in not more than 30-40 words each:

- How did Gandhi look at the theme of social service?

- 2) Why can't, according to the author, Gandhi be considered the epitome of Hindu tradition?
- 3) Who influenced Gandhi in his pacifism?
- 4) How, according to the author, will the Hindi civilization retain its continuity?
- 5) What were the main sources of Gandhiji's philosophy of life?
- 6) What important changes have taken place in India after independence?
- 7) What evidence does A.L. Basham cite to prove that Indian culture has 'changed a lot'?

C. Answer the following questions in 60-80 words each:

- 1) How have Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda and Gandhi viewed Social Service?
- 2) Hindu civilization constitutes the culture of synthesis. Illustrate.

D. Say whether the following are True or False. Write 'T' for True and 'F' for False in the bracket:

- 1) Gandhi's championing of Women's right is the result of Western influence. []
- 2) The writer believes that the Indians of coming generations will not be unconvincing and self-conscious copies of Europeans. []
- 3) The author's firm belief is that Indian tradition continues and it will never be lost. []
- 4) The Indian way of life is much affected by the labour saving devices of the West. []

Activity 2: VOCABULARY

A. Match Column 'A' with Column 'B'

A	B
1. Something that shows a set of qualities.	Conservative
2. Something inherited from an earlier generation	Heritage
3. Orthodox	Epitome
4. Liberalism	Pyre
5. Large pile of wood for burning a dead body	A philosophy that expounds freedom, progress and liberty of man

B. The word 'culture' means way of life, customs and beliefs, art, social organization of a particular country or group, etc. It may also mean art/music/literature, beliefs/attitudes, growing/breeding, cells/bacteria etc. Now read the following sentences/phrases and identify in which sense the word 'culture' has been used?

- 1) The political cultures of the United States and Europe are very different.
- 2) The popular culture of India is different from the West.
- 3) The culture of silkworms
- 4) Yogurt is made from active cultures

Activity 3: GRAMMAR

Present tense

Present tense forms in English are of four kinds.

The simple present

In the simple present tense, the verb is used in the stem form if the subject is plural, and in the stem+s form if the subject is third person singular. For example:

We *eat* rice, (stem)
Ashok *eats* rice, (stem + s)
They *love* chocolates, (stem)
She *loves* chocolates, (stem + s)
I love bananas (stem)

The simple present tense is used to refer to eternal truths (things that are always true or believed to be true). Read the following sentences:

The Sun *rises* in the East. Hydrogen *is* lighter than air.
Arteries *carry* blood from the heart to different parts of the body.
Hard work *leads* to success.

Next, the simple present tense is used to refer to routine or habitual activity (actions that are performed regularly, or every day). For example:

Hari *gets up* at 6.00 a.m. He *brushes* his teeth and *drinks* a glass of milk.

Further, the simple present tense is used to describe objects, places, people, etc. For example:

A pressure-cooker *is* a metal vessel with a tight-fitting lid, through which steam cannot escape. The lid *has* a tiny opening, called a vent, over which a valve *sits*. Pressure cookers *help* us to cook food quickly.

The simple present tense is also used to describe or to demonstrate an action or activity which is in progress ('going on') at the present time. For example:

Shoaib Akhtar *bowls*. Tendulkar *hits* the ball towards the square leg boundary.

Here, the simple present tense is used to talk about an action which is actually in progress at the moment of speaking. (You can see that the examples are taken from a running commentary on a cricket match. However, we use the present progressive tense more often for this purpose.) You can also see this on television, for example, when an expert teaches the viewers how to cook a dish. For example:

Today, I will show you how to make fish curry. First, I *chop* some onions and *fry* them in oil until they are brown. Then, I *add* some curry powder to the onions and *heat* the mixture over a low flame. Then I *put in*...

The present progressive tense

In the present progressive tense, the verb is used in the progressive (stem + *ing*) form and some form of the verb 'be' (*is, am, are*) is used in front of the verb, as a helping verb or auxiliary. For example:

My father *is playing* a game of chess.
My friends *are walking* to the post office.

The present progressive tense is used to refer to an action which is in progress at the moment of speaking.

The two Pakistani opening batsmen *are going out* to start the innings.
The Indian fielders *are taking up* their positions.

The present progressive is sometimes used to indicate action in the future. Here is an example.

I *am starting* a new business next year.

As mentioned earlier, there are several different ways of indicating future activity, and using the present progressive is one of them. It has a rather special meaning, which we shall examine later, when we talk about the different ways of referring to future activity.

The present perfect tense

In the present perfect tense, the verb is used in the past participle forms. Either 'have' or 'has' is used in front of it as a helping verb. For example :

The child *has eaten* a biscuit.
The boys *have gone* to school.
I *have given away* all the books.

The use of the present perfect tense shows that an action was completed sometime in the past and, further, that the completed action has some kind of relevance to the present moment of speech. (The word 'perfect' tells us that the action is complete.)

The present perfect progressive tense

The present perfect progressive tense is, as the name suggests, a combination of the present perfect and the present progressive tenses, in form as well as in meaning. Here is an example.

Sheila *has been teaching* in this school since 25 July 2004.

Notice that the verb ('teach') is in the *-ing* form used in the progressive tense, but there are two helping verbs that come before it. The first is a form of 'have' ('have'/'has'), followed by 'been', which is the past participle form of 'be'. The presence of the progressive form ('teaching') suggests action in progress, while the presence of the participle ('has been') suggests completed action. The combination of the present progressive and the present perfect tense tells us that:

- a. the action began at some point in the past.
- b. the action has continued without a break until the present moment (the moment of speaking).

The prepositions 'since' and 'for' are often used with verbs in the present perfect progressive tense. 'Since' is used to refer to the point of time (in the past) at which an action began, while 'for' refers to the period of time during which the action has been in progress. For example:

I *have been living* in Delhi since 1988.

I *have been living* in Delhi for 18 years.

Note the difference between 'He *is playing* tennis' (present progressive) and 'He *has been playing* tennis' (present perfect progressive). The present progressive tells us that the action is in progress now; it says nothing about when the action began. The present perfect progressive, on the other hand, indicates that the action began in the past and has continued until the present time.

Activity 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY

'The Wonder that was India' reveals many important aspects of Indian culture and history. Divide the class into groups and discuss among the groups some such aspects of Indian culture and history that make it distinct.

Activity 5: COMPOSITION

The heritage of India fascinates the foreigners. The foreigners are interested in Indian heritage but we do not know much about ourselves. Enlist the ways which would enable us to have a deeper understanding of it.