

## CULTURAL HISTORY OF INDIA IN ARNOLD TOYNBEE'S “INDIA’S CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD UNITY”

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper highlights the unique Indian qualities that attracted the westerners. The qualities Indians inherited by ancestors are time immemorial. Arnold Toynbee's views, observations about Indians and their attitude towards life is noteworthy. The deep roots of culture, tradition, spiritual, ethical values of Indians in attainment of salvation and success in attaining freedom marked a landmark in history of the world. The present world of technology is groping in darkness with loss of human values. The present paper guides to look back to Indian history to learn, unlearn and relearn the Indian values by the present generation.

**Key words: Culture, tradition, spirituality, Non-violence, world unity**

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The present paper focuses on how an English man viewed India and the life of Indians in 1960s. Arnold Joseph Toynbee, an eminent historian, appreciates the Indian values and its contribution to the world unity. Arnold Toynbee admires the bright prospectus India holds by the achievements in the glorious past. In his talk delivered at Azad memorial lectures at New Delhi in 1960, in his concluding lecture highlights Indians' role in contributing to the world unity

Arnold Toynbee traces the unique qualities of the great Indian tradition, which are carefully handed down to the next generation from time immemorial, and appreciates the accomplished characteristics of Indians and their culture. He spoke of the three points. Firstly,

the characteristic Indian attitude towards life. Secondly, an approach to the handling of human affairs, and thirdly, the very character is of a great value to the present world.

Arnold Toynbee admires the attitude that Indians have for life. Indians are sensitive and tolerant and value culture. These unique qualities of Indians are experienced by a foreigner like Arnold Toynbee in many forms through people, culture, tradition, language, and festivals. Arnold opines that, these qualities of Indians that the world needs to learn from Indians at present.

India is diverse, yet spiritual. It is peaceful, yet chaotic. The pious nature of Indians and the tradition of treating guests as Gods " *Atithi Devo Bhav*" paved way for the westerns to enter India easily. Arnold says that one quality of Indian virtue 'freedom from rancor' that impressed him greatly and touched him deeply. Arnold appreciates the spirit of patriotism and unity with which Indians fought for their nations' freedom. Most importantly, as an English man, he could feel deep-rooted inherited Indian culture in Indians through their way of life. As he observes and notes that Indians do not brood over the past or nurse grievances.

Arnold Toynbee was profoundly impressed by the 'quality of forgiveness' widely preached in the west, yet practiced widely by the Indians in reality to the greatest extent. He identifies the rich culture and traditions inherited by Indians. The sense of spirituality and ethical values are imbibed in the people but naturally.

India is the only country in the world to get its independence through non-violent means. Arnold Toynbee remembers his visit to Gandhi's shrine at Delhi, when he went to pay reverence to him. He wondered at the power of Gandhiji and the strong will power and belief that he had in the practice of non-violence means to attain freedom. He holds great respect for Gandhi. He wondered how a leader along with his compatriots became successful in liberating his country from foreign rule without bloodshed or fight through non-violent means.

While appreciating the struggle of Indian freedom movement, he also admits that his own countrymen-Britishers too, learnt good many lessons from Indians struggle for freedom. Arnold Toynbee humbly expresses his gratitude to Gandhiji for having saved the two countries by keeping the freedom struggle on spiritual plane. He further says that the quality of spirituality and 'Ahimsa' non-violence are the inherent qualities of Indians.

Arnold Toynbee was an eminent historian and the author of a monumental work '*A Study of History*' written in ten volumes deals with the growth and decay of the six chief civilizations of the world. Arnold Toynbee holds that, "the course of history is determined by psychic and not

materialistic forces that, the well being of a civilization lies in its ability to respond successfully to human and environmental challenges”. Thus, he appreciates voluntary contribution of Indians in the Bhoodan movement of 1951 led by Vinoba Bhave. Bhoodan movement was known as “lands gift mission’ in India, brought not only economic revolution but also a moral one. The movement exemplified the practice of universal love, compassion, peace, and right action.

He goes back to the historical period of Buddhist emperor Ashoka who lived during 230 BC and propagated the doctrines of tolerance and non-violence for peace and world unity.

E M Foster the famous English novelist, in his essay 'Tolerance' appreciates the efforts of king Ashoka. As a historian, he records that the king not only recorded his exploits, but also the need for mercy, mutual understanding, and peace. These illustrations are the true reflections of deep-rooted spiritual values and rich cultural history of India.

Arnold Toynbee was sensitive to the activities of modern man and was concerned about the life of a modern man in the atomic age. He felt the great urge to practice non-violence deliberately. Aftermaths of the two World Wars were heart rendering. Through its devastating effects had caused irreparable damage to the humanity. Even today the sense of pride and hatred persists all over the world and a sense of fear lingers all over the globe. Training the military and hoarding of arms and ammunition by all the countries of the world has become the common feature that result in war like environment. The latest technology is used for the preparation of the most advanced, powerful, and yet dangerous atomic bombs. Hence, war like atmosphere results in the loss of human values and persistence of intolerance results in the loss of peace. It is this important quality, which is the need of the hour.

Placing this example of Hiroshima and Nagasaki before us, Arnold Toynbee advises Indians to live up to the Indian ideal, which is the most exacting legacy of Indian heritage. He further adds that there is a great spiritual responsibility rests on India.

Non-violence is one approach to truth and salvation and it is the feeling inspired by a moral ideal. This moral ideal was bond up with a spirit of non-violence. India attained salvation through spiritual reality. The word salvation meant attainment of harmony with reality. Arnold Toynbee says that, this broad-minded approach towards envisioned reality is the characteristic of India. The sense of piety that dwells in the innermost recesses of Indians united them to get freedom for the nation.

Another important quality of Indians that Arnold Toynbee notes is, the quality of appreciation of 'variety'. He considers it as a great value for the rest of the world. In the age of technology, we are physically neighbors and psychologically still strangers to each other. We have forgotten to appreciate the variety instead engaged in letting this consciousness of variety make us fear and hate each other and trying for mutual destruction. Instead of accepting and appreciating individual difference, the gap is widening day by day due to intolerance. Toynbee says that, Indians' outstanding achievement of unity in diversity is greatly commended for the world. The idea of '*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*' existed for ages in India. It is the need of the hour in the present day world.

Arnold Toynbee observes the need for the qualities of tolerance, forgiveness, and love for your neighbors. He looks at India and says that, the qualities that the world needs is practised in India since ages. He also appreciates the broad minded approach of Indians towards reality and contemplating spirit, and realization of spiritual activity in practical work are some of the traits of Indian character. He further says that it is the 'virtue of contemplation' practiced in India, is the greatest lesson that India has to teach to the present day world. He further concludes by saying that 'art of contemplation' is in other terms the 'art of living'. He recognizes the spiritual gifts of Indians, which makes man human. There are number of examples to prove the values that we Indians inherit and are reflective in every act that we perform.

In the era of hybridization and globalization culture, there is a need for us to look back and think of the values and traditions inherited by us. Are we in a position to state that the values, traditions and the rich varied culture which contributed to the world unity are still contributing?, Or is there a threat by the globalization which is hybridizing the culture?, Is there birth of new culture with the amalgamation hybridized cultures? These questions vex us and a sense of fear of losing our ethnicity lingers.

To conclude there is Indianess in every Indian. It is the responsibility of every Indian to cherish the glorious past of India's rich cultural heritage, and nourish and nurture it for the future generations. It is also the time to look back and learn, unlearn, relearn the Indian values to empower the world with unique Indian qualities.

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Reference:

India's contribution to World Unity by Arnold Toynbee