

Hindu Culture



Commence the class with the Opening Prayer. Take attendance. For the Memory Time, children will learn to chant the verses given in the Prayers section.

TOPIC OF THE DAY

The topic of the day consists of:

- ◆ The King's Order
- ◆ Our Cosmos
- ◆ Civilization And Culture
- ◆ Emergence Of Culture
- ◆ Culture Or Vulture
- ◆ Material Culture Versus Spiritual Culture

The King's Order

Long time ago there was a king who loved his wife dearly and would do anything for her. One fine morning the king ordered, "Cover the whole earth with leather."

His minister politely asked for the reason. The king said, "My queen got blisters in her feet when she went to the temple yesterday afternoon!" The minister was perplexed at the king's response to the problem.

Discussion

Discuss with children:

- ◆ Why was the minister shocked?
- ◆ Was the king's solution appropriate?
- ◆ How else could this problem be handled?
- ◆ What are the possible solutions?

Conclusion: All that is needed is a pair of sandals for the queen and the problem is taken care of! It is lot simpler and feasible than covering the whole earth.

Our Cosmos

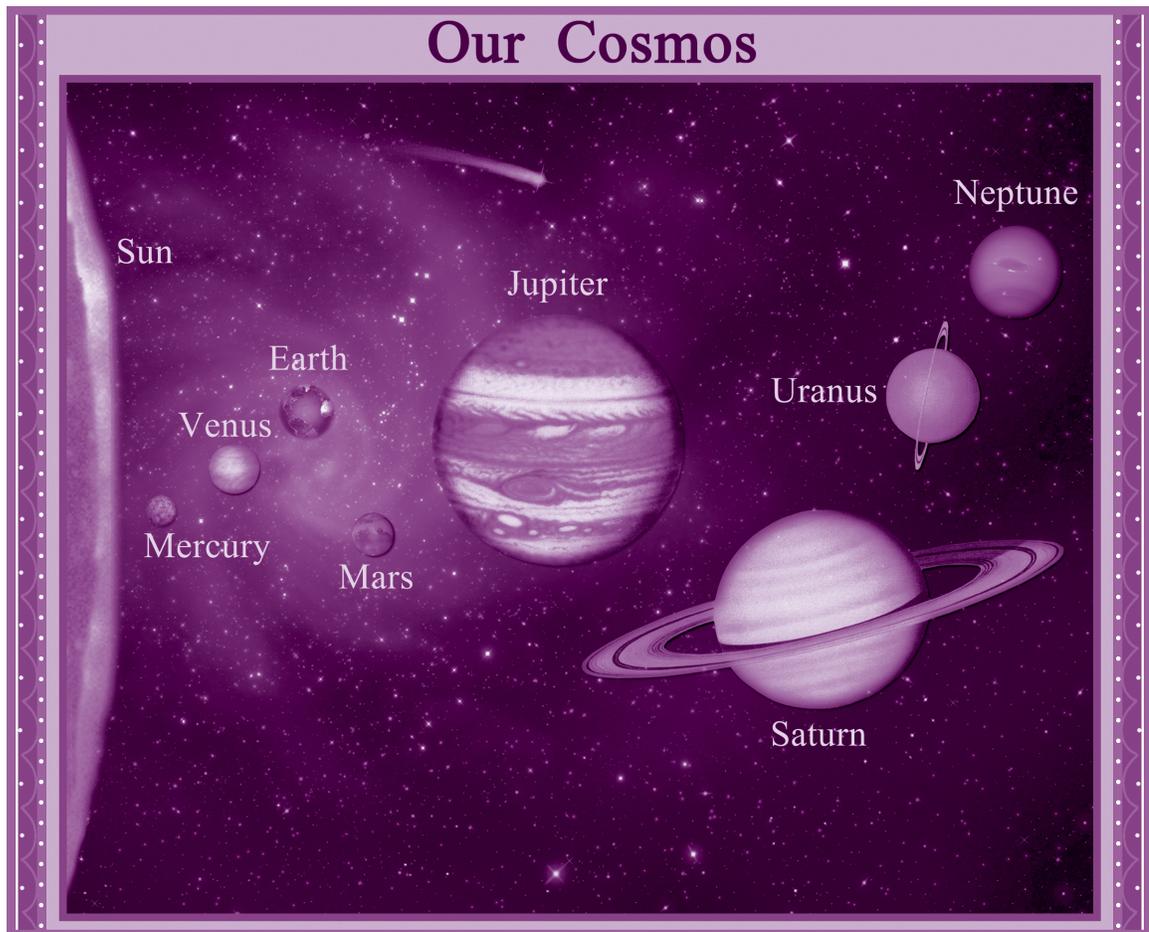
Copy the picture of the cosmos given in the Appendix. Show it to the children. Here is our cosmos. Where is Mother Earth? We are residents of the planet earth. Ask few children to show their home on the picture. They would wonder why the teacher is asking such a question as it is impossible to point out to a home in the





whole cosmos. In the vastness of the cosmos, our blue planet Earth, where we all live, is merely a dot!

When we see ourselves in the background of the cosmos, our existence is not even that of a speck! And yet, when we look in the mirror, our vanity goes up! We are proud of our achievements, our accomplishments, our looks, the cars we drive, and the homes we live in! We want to change people, control things and beings around as we please!



In the cosmos what can we change? On the earth what can we change? Are we able to change anything? As a matter of fact we can change nothing!

- ◆ Can you change the rain into sunshine because you are having a party?
- ◆ Can you change your siblings, parents, relatives because you don't like the way they are?
- ◆ Your nose is just a little bit longer, can you change it? Yes, maybe just a little adjustment with plastic surgery but not much!
- ◆ Can you change the color of your skin?

Brainstorm and come up with more scenarios.

Think! What can you really change? Actually, not much! When we become ruthlessly honest, we find that we really have no control over the whole universe! We may want things differently; we may want to change certain things and beings around us! We may want our friends not be friends with others but, we have no control; we have no choice! More we try to change things outside, more we recognize how helpless we are. If we keep on expecting others to change, we alone become unhappy.

But on this planet Earth we do have control on one thing, which is our own self! We can change our attitude, we can change our habits, we can change our behaviors, we can change physically, mentally, intellectually, and spiritually! In the cosmos, we cannot change anything, we have no control over anything but, we have total freedom to change ourselves.

Just by covering the queen's feet, she got the freedom to roam around the whole globe without any blisters. We too, can roam around the globe without any blisters on our heart if we wear the proper shoes!

Civilization And Culture

Pūjya Gurudeva Swami Chinmayananda proclaimed: "Man's control of nature external is civilization. His control of nature internal is culture."

We may learn and discover many facts about our cosmos and make our life very comfortable; we may have a glorious civilization but man can become happy only when he has control over his own internal nature, i.e., be a cultured man. Wear the shoes of "culture" and roam around the globe without getting blisters on the heart!

Emergence Of Culture

Pūjya Gurudeva Swami Chinmayananda says that when a group of people live together for a long time in a particular geographical area, living certain values, the special individuality or fragrance that emerges from that group is said to be their culture.

When an individual behaves in a particular way, we generally say, "That is his nature." But when a community responds to different situations in a particular way, we say it is its culture. The difference is that with respect to one person's mode of behavior, we call it nature; and with respect to a community, we call it culture. They influence each other, no doubt, for the individual will influence the total and the total influences the behavior of the individual.

In Sanskrit, we call the individual's nature *saiṅskāra*. In a family with three or four children, though each is born into the same culture, we find that each individual behaves differently. Then we ask: If they are all born in the same family, the same culture, and in the same country, why then does each person behave differently? It is because of nature (*saiṅskāra*, *svabhāva*); and one's actions



are in accordance with his/her own particular tendencies. When it comes to a group, however, we say that the group's mode of behavior and response is its culture.

In Sanskrit, the word for culture is *saṁskṛti*. "*Kṛtam*" means "that which is done." "*Sam*" means "very well." So, "*saṁskṛti*" means "that which is very well made, very well refined." In terms of behavior, when we speak of culture we also mean a kind of refinement.

To understand further about *saṁskṛti*, we need to know what is *prakṛti* and *vikṛti*.

Prakṛti

The inherent nature or tendency of a thing is called its *prakṛti*. For example, animals live according to their urges or desires such as hunger, thirst, feelings of fear or insecurity, and the need for sleep. This is defined as their nature, *prakṛti*. We, the human beings also have these same feelings of fear, hunger, thirst, and desire for progeny. These are natural urges; there is nothing wrong in this.

As long as we are acting according to our nature, there is no problem. But there is a difference between the urges of an animal and us. The animals' urges and pursuits are controlled by nature; they remain within limits and never transgress nature. For example, a cow will always be a vegetarian while we can decide and change our food habits. Therefore, the animal's behavior is true to its *prakṛti*. For instance, when a dog has satisfied its hunger, it will not eat anymore; when a dog is sick, it will not eat food, but eat only grass as medicine. Nature has given them this understanding which is not so for human beings.

Vikṛti

Vikṛti, in this context is translated as "perversion." When some urge or desire grows out of proportion and we transgress the limits of *prakṛti*, it is *vikṛti*, perversion. For example, living by *prakṛti* makes life peaceful, easy, and happy. Living by *vikṛti* makes life stressful.





Copy the pictures given in the Appendix and show children the difference between *prakṛti* and *vikṛti*. To prevent *prakṛti* from turning into *vikṛti*, what we need is *saṁskṛti*, culture. We are blessed with the faculty of thinking, which allows us a lot of freedom. We can either make our life successful or destroy it; both are possible. Thus, this faculty of thinking is a blessing, only if we use it correctly.

Culture Or Vulture

Śrī Ramakrishna *Paramahansa* used to say that our minds are like that of a vulture. A vulture flies very high in the sky, but where are its eyes? They are on the dead body lying on the ground. The moment it sights the dead body, it swoops down to eat it! We are also like that. A person may reach to a very high position of political, economic, or financial power, but where is his mind?

If the mind is like the vulture fixed on low, baser things (immoral habits), we need culture in order to fly high, not only materially, but morally and spiritually as well. Then, the mind rises to true spiritual heights.

Living our life based on noble values is the most important aspect of culture. Why do we need values? Why do we need to respect them and live by them? There is a danger of our nature, *prakṛti*, transgressing its limits, and becoming perversion, *vikṛti*. This is what we see in the world today: greed for money, power, and position. One maybe rich, well-educated, or politically powerful, but he may not possess the refinement of character which we call *saṁskṛti*. The beauty of a person does not lie in physical, educational, or other capabilities, but in culture, which expresses itself every moment in one's day-to-day life.

Material Culture Versus Spiritual Culture

Ask children to name things they can think of. Whatever they say, you jot it down on the board. Once the chalkboard is full, ask them to categorize all the items



into groups. They may divide as male/female, good/bad, positive/negative, sentient/insentient etc.

Then, draw the discussion to the point that in the world there are things that we can see and there are things that we do not. For example: sound waves, and x-rays, we do not see them but we know they are very much present. If one's life is based upon the validity and reality of seen things only, he is a materialist, following materialistic culture—*bhautika saṁskṛti*; such people have faith in matter. Perception of the material, tangible world is given complete validity and reality. Something that is not seen, known, or is not verifiable by scientific experiment in the laboratory is not accepted as real.

On the other hand, there are people who say, “Whatever is seen and felt by the senses is fine but there are many things that we do not see, but they do exist.” Sense perception is not the only means of knowing what is real. These are the people who are followers of spiritual culture—*ādhyātmika saṁskṛti*.

The materialist does not accept the existence of the unseen. Even if they do feel that something other than the seen exists, they only pay lip service to it and make no further inquiry into it. Their time is spent only in enjoying and exploring what is seen!

That which is unseen is given more importance than what is seen is the highlight of spiritual culture. The existence of matter, the existence of objects and beings is not denied, but there is something, though unseen and invisible, which also exists. The body moves and carries on all its functions, but because of what does it function? I exist now, but what happens after death? Where do I go? That something, which exists, though unseen, is called the Spirit, and the inquiry into it is the basis of what we call spiritual culture. Hindu culture is a spiritual culture.

In a materialistic culture, one wants to conquer and make use of nature for personal convenience. In spiritual culture one wants to understand and live in harmony with nature and finally goes beyond it. The spiritual philosophy totally transforms the life of the individual as well as that of the entire community.

CLOSING

In this lesson, we discussed that:

- ◆ Man's control of nature external is civilization. His control of nature internal is culture.
- ◆ The inherent nature or tendency of a thing is called its *prakṛti*. When some urge or desire grows out of proportion and we transgress the limits of *prakṛti*, it is *vikṛti*, perversion. To prevent *prakṛti* from turning into *vikṛti*, what we need is *saṁskṛti*, culture.
- ◆ Culture (*saṁskṛti*) is of two types:
 - Materialistic culture—*bhautika saṁskṛti*; focus of life is matter, that which is seen.
 - Spiritual culture—*ādhyātmika saṁskṛti*; focus of life is Spirit, that which is not seen.

- ◆ Hindu culture is a spiritual culture.

Conclude the class with the following:

- ◆ Quiet Time: Follow one of the techniques given in the Appendix to make children's mind quiet.
- ◆ Closing Prayer: Chant the Closing Prayer given in the Prayers section.

