

The eternal teachings of Hinduism in everyday life

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This paper is an attempt to focus on some illustrious teachings of Hinduism that flow in the minds of the Hindus through generations and enlighten them to find fruitful meaning of life. Slokas of religious strictures, books and historical evidences are used to illustrate the messages. Real life examples are also given. In modern times, when the human society is segmented into conflicting religious groups, castes, creeds and sects that adversely affect the prosperity of mankind, when many countries are suffering from terrorism and extremism, the divine teachings of Hinduism widely practiced by majority Indians in daily life uphold the vision of one world-where every human being is celebrated, every beliefs and thoughts are accepted and considered to be true. These teachings enable the problem-stricken world to find peace and tranquillity amongst the civilised people.

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Introduction

The renowned philosopher Dr. Sarbapalli Radhakrishnan has pronounced in his book "The Hindu View of Life" that Hinduism is not a religion; rather it is a way of life (Radhakrishnan, 1926). Supreme Court of India has upheld this view in due course (Supreme Court of India verdict delivered by three judges Bench led by Justice J S Verma in 1995 in the Bal Thackeray Vs. Sri Pravakar Kashinath Kunte & Others). When we review the major religions of the world, we find that they mostly have one God, one religious book and a particular form of religious practices. In Hinduism, a multidimensional scenario is found. It contains multi-various religious sects, varieties of religious books and many Gods and Goddesses (according to Hindu mythology the number of Gods and Goddesses are thirty-three crores). Even atheism and antagonism as concepts are acclaimed and accepted in this religion. The philosophy of 'Charvaka' who was a proclaimed atheist has been gradually included in the Hindu philosophy and he has been honoured as 'Rishi'- the saint (Burns, 2019). Gautama Buddha- a rebellion of the orthodox Hindu order, when asked about the existence of God remained silent. He has been incarnated as one of the 'Avatars' out of ten 'avatars' of Hindu religion (Mathew, 2005). One of the reasons of this pluralistic nature and vastness of Hinduism may be its secular and holistic vision which not only accept other views but also believe them as true (Prabhananda, 2003).

In *Bishnupurana* a definition of India (*Bharata*) has been given –

Uttaram yatsamudrasya himādreścaiva dakṣiṇam |

Varṣam bhāratam nāma bhāratī yatra santatiḥi |

Source: **Bishnupurāṇa**

[North of the sea and South of Himalayas there lays the land which is known as 'Bharata' and the inhabitants of the land is known as 'Bharati'].

This ancient definition has addressed the geographical location of the country rather than any religious description of the place and its people. The constitution of India has announced India as a secular country irrespective of its majority population being Hindu may be due to the influence of this definition.

The Origin of Teachings

If we go through the *slokas* of *Rigveda* - the most ancient of all the Vedas, it is found that various ingredients of nature like wind, storm, rain, fire, etc. are being imagined as powerful deities and being worshipped (Bhattacharji, 1970). Since then the concepts of "Jaalseva", "Vayuseva", "Brikshaseva", (serving water, wind, and trees) etc. has been developed. This feeling of one-ness with natural attributes implanted in the minds of the Indians since time immemorial is continuing. Due to the attachment and love with Mother Nature an Indian utters the following *sloka* in the morning before he or she puts his or her feet on the floor -

Karāgre vasate lakṣmī kara madhye sarasvatī |
Karamūle tu govinda prabhāte karadarśanam |
Samudravasane devi parvata stanamaṇḍale |
Viṣṇupatni namastubhyaṃ pādaspārśaṃ kṣamasvame ||

[Devi *Lakshmi* is seating in my fore palm, Devi *Saraswati* in the middle palm and Lord *Krishna* in the root of my palm and I see my palm in the morning to see the divine.

Sea is the clothing of *Narayani*, the wife of *Vishnu*, the mountains are her breasts, and I seek apology to her to put my feet on her body]

This divine feeling for human and nature of most of the Indians have been consecrated through generations and through relationships and teaching of Gurus and his disciples from Vedic period resulted a creation of 'win-win' mindset of most of the Indians and they earnestly pray -

Sarve'pi sukhīnaḥ santu sarvesantu niramayāḥ |
Sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantū mā kaścit duḥkhabhāgbhavet ||

Source: *Atharvaveda- Shantipatha*

[Let everyone in this material world be happy, let everyone be cured, let everyone feel the joy of life and nobody should be deserted and unhappy]

The reflection of this mentality is being characterised in the attitude and behaviour of the Indians through the ages- some examples may be cited herewith:

'Rishi' Vyas has written the epic '*Mahabharata*' after listening from Lord '*Ganesh*' who has chanted more than lakhs of *slokas* (*Ganguli and Hare, 1992*). 'Rishi' Vyas has told only two things of his own:

Aṣṭādaśa purāṇeṣu vyāsasya vacanadvayam |
Paropakāraḥ puṇyāya pāpāya parapīḍanam ||

Source: *Panchatantra*

[Benevolence or doing well to others is a blessing of God and oppressing others is a sin.]

The Legacy of Non-Violence and Fellow Feeling

Philanthropy is a medium to earn blessings of God and torturing others is a sin- this feeling enables the Indians to help the poor and the marginalised. In *Kautilya's 'Arthashastra'* it is being advised to donate one sixth of the individual earnings to the poor (*Rangarajan, 1992*). Paying alms to beggars and receiving it is considered virtuous in India, rather it is hated in many countries of the world. Indian history narrates that India as a country never conquered other country for the sake of invasion and never oppressed other

racess. Rather they have given shelter to people of other civilisations and conquerors who invaded India. They gradually intermingled with mainstream of people in course of time. Armed with a feeling that 'violence is a sin' – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi led Indian freedom fighting movement in which thousands of Indians participated and laid down their lives (Saran, 1969). According to the foreign politicians and world leaders of those days, the non-violent movement of Indian freedom struggle was considered as unique and unprecedented. "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth" – said of Mahatma Gandhi by Albert Einstein (Einstein, 2012).

The essence of philanthropy of Indian mind-set has contributed more concepts of fellow feeling and benevolence in Indian literature and philosophy. Hindu tradition proclaims "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" (The *Mahopanisada*: 4th Chapter, sloka no. 7)-- people of the entire world are my relatives and "*Atithi Devo Bhavo*"- Guest is my God (Chinmayananda, 2014). It is not only mere proverbs, but these are actually practiced in daily lives of Indian people.

Examples of Philanthropic Practices in Daily Life

In *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and other mythologies there are a lot of stories regarding treating guests as God and even dying for them – but we can find some glaring examples of this gesture from the documented history of India. *Hiuen Tsang*– the famous Chinese traveller wrote a book in 632 AD namely '*Si Yu Ki*' (Beal, 1994). In this book he wrote about a girl of tender age whom he met on his way to *Uttarapath* (Northern part of the country). He was thirsty and asked the girl for drinking water. The girl offered him water along with some sweets. *Hiuen Tsang* asked the girl "Why have you brought sweets? I only asked for water." The girl out of her simplicity replied "What kind of man are you? Don't you know only water cannot be offered to a guest?" According to scientists whatever a human being learns and sees in his or her tender age has a permanent impact on his or her brain, behaviour and character (Platonov, 1959). The gesture towards a guest and sense of fellow feeling has been taught by the mother and parents to a child which he or she bears lifelong. When I find my five year old nephew being rebuked by his mother for giving away his tiffin to others and out of his simplicity he asked "Mom, why don't you give such big tiffin so that all of us can share?" – it assures me that we are on the right track.

In 1971, India and Pakistan, two neighbouring countries, were at war. Sixteen thousand Indian soldiers were martyred, in-numerous people of the then East Pakistan was slaughtered by Pakistani Army, a new country Bangladesh was formed and India won the war (Gill, 2003). Indian Army captured ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers and put in *Binnaguri* Cantonment of West Bengal. General *Sam Manekshaw*, leading the Indian Army asked his men to vacate the barracks for the Pakistani captive soldiers in order to provide them better stay and Indian soldiers were shifted to tented accommodation. General ordered to treat them as guests and to provide them all facilities and treatment as authorised by a prisoner of war as per Geneva Convention. This unique gesture of the Indian army is still adorned when we get the news of atrocities made to the mercenaries at *Abu Ghraib* prison by American soldiers post 9/11 (Hamm, 2007).

Limitations of the Study and Avenues of Further Research

The volume of literature on Indology and Hinduism is enormous. It is not possible to make a holistic study on this issue within the scope of a research article. The knowledge base of the researcher is not adequate to explore the inner meaning and essence of the ancient *slokas* of religious strictures. It results in omission of vast references and limits the study in a sketchy manner. Therefore, a concerted effort is needed to compile important ingredients of teachings in Hinduism from a sea of information scattered in various sources. It is difficult for an individual researcher to make an attempt of doing this type of research single-handedly. Consortium of academic institutions and research institutes across the

world may initiate a comprehensive study on this area of research. The exploration of research findings will surely enrich the world to find peaceful solutions to the global unrest.

Conclusion

Being one of the ancient civilizations, Indian civilization is known as *Hindu* civilization as most of the inhabitants of this country are Hindus (Chandramouli and General, 2011). According to the 2011 census, 79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism, 14.2% adheres to Islam, 2.3% adheres to Christianity, and 1.7% adheres to Sikhism. Most of the people of this country are religious. Political, social, economic and personal lives of the Hindus are influenced by religious practices and rituals. In one hand those beliefs and scriptures teach them to 'live and let live' focusing on win-win mentality, on the other hand whenever the religious freedom of the people are at stake they rise and protest. Swami Vivekananda has rightly mentioned in his book '*Prachya O Paschatya*' that India's originality is its religious freedom (Vivekananda, 1950). According to him, people of every country possess their own idea of freedom. The French citizens are concerned of their political freedom. French Revolution took place due to the urge of common people in order to get rid of absolute monarchy. British are sensitive of their economic freedom. Similarly, Indian people are cautious of their religious identity and freedom. It can be stated that the first freedom fighting movement in 1857 against the British Rule known as Sepoy Mutiny was occurred due to a religious cause (Chattopadhyaya, 1957). The latest conflict of *Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid* issue that shaken Indian society and politics is also religious. This urge for religious identity and freedom has enabled the Indian society to rise against oppression since many centuries and history of Indian social movement is a history of religious reformation led by reformists. The urge for religious freedom has been reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's song –

**Dharma yabe śaṅkha rabe karibe āhbāna
Nīraba hoye, namra hoye, paṇa kariyo prāṇa ।**

Source: *Gītābitan* – Rabindranath Tagore

[When religion calls, humbly devote your life]

In the conclusion we can say that India may be called holy land based on vibrant religion and spiritualism. Religion in this country has shown light to people from darkness, has transformed human beings to divinity. That is why poet has chanted ...

*Chandana hai iss deśh kī māṭī,
Tapo bhūmi har grāma hai ।
Har bālā devī kī pratimā,
Sab bacchā-bacchā rām hai*

[The land of this country is holy, every village is considered to be place of worship, each and every lady is sacred, and children are like young *Rama*]

Important Notes

Charvaka (IAST: Cārvāka)

Also known as **Lokāyata**, is an ancient school of Indian materialism. Charvaka holds direct perception, empiricism, and conditional inference as proper sources of knowledge, embraces philosophical skepticism and rejects ritualism and supernaturalism. Brihaspati, dating back to at least 1500 BC and earlier is usually referred to as the founder of Charvaka or Lokāyata philosophy. During the Hindu reformation period in the 600 BC, when Buddhism and Jainism arose, the philosophy was well documented and refuted by the new religions. One of the widely studied principles of Charvaka philosophy was its rejection of inference as a means to establish valid, universal knowledge,

and metaphysical truths. Charvaka is categorized as a heterodox school of Indian philosophy. It is considered an example of atheistic schools in the Hindu tradition.

Concept of Avatar in Hinduism

An *avatar*, a concept in Hinduism that means "descent", is the material appearance or incarnation of a deity on earth. The relative verb to "alight, to make one's appearance" is sometimes used to refer to any guru or revered human being. *Dashavatar* refers to the ten primary *avatars* of Vishnu, the Hindu god of preservation. Vishnu is said to descend in form of an *avatar* to restore cosmic order. The word *Dashavatara* derives from *daśa*, meaning 'ten', and *avatar* (*avatāra*), roughly equivalent to 'incarnation'. The Buddha was included as one of the *avatars* of Vishnu under Bhagavatism by the Gupta period between 330 and 550 AD. The adoption of Buddha as an *avatar* in Bhagavatism was a catalyzing factor in Buddhism's assimilation into Vaishnavism's mythic hierarchy. By the 8th century AD, the Buddha was included as an *avatar* of Vishnu in several Puranas. This assimilation is indicative of the Hindu ambivalence toward the Buddha and Buddhism.

Legacy of Briksha Seva (Serving and saving of trees) by Indians

Bishnoi (also known as Vishnoi) is a Hindu religious sect found in the Western Thar Desert and northern states of India. They follow a set of 29 principles/commandments given by Guru Jambheshwar (1451-1536). They are not a caste but a sect comprised mainly of followers of jat and tarkhan caste who gave up their caste claims upon becoming bishnois. The Bishnoi narrate the story of Amrita Devi, a member of the sect who inspired as many as 363 other Bishnois to go to their deaths in protest of the cutting down of Khejri trees in September 1730. The maharajah of Jodhpur, Abhay Singh, requiring wood for the construction of a new palace, sent soldiers to cut trees in the village of Khejarli, which was called Jehnad at that time. Noticing their actions, Devi hugged a tree in an attempt to stop them. Her family then adopted the same strategy, as did other local people when the news spread. She told the soldiers that she considered their actions to be an insult to her faith and that she was prepared to die to save the trees. The soldiers did indeed kill her and others until Abhay Singh was informed of what was going on and intervened to stop the massacre. Some of the 363 Bishnois who were killed protecting the trees were buried in Khejarli, where a simple grave with four pillars was erected. Every year, in September, the Bishnois assemble there to commemorate the sacrifice made by their people to preserve their faith and religion.

In modern times a similar movement was started in India. **Chipko Movement**, started in 1973, was a non-violent movement aimed at protection and conservation of trees and forests from being destroyed. The name of the Chipko movement originated from the word 'embrace' as the villagers used to hug the trees and protect them from wood cutters from cutting them. The movement started in Uttarakhand's Mandal village (then a part of Uttar Pradesh) in the upper Alakananda valley. Soon it spread to other Himalayan districts of the state.

Vyasa and Ganesha in Mahabharata

Vyasa is the legendary author of the *Mahabharata*, *Vedas* and *Puranas*, some of the most important works in the Hindu tradition. He is also called *Veda Vyāsa* or *Krishna Dvaipāyana* (referring to his dark complexion and birthplace). *Vyasa* is traditionally known as the chronicler of this epic and also features as an important character in it. In the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, *Vyasa* asks *Ganesha* to assist him in writing the text. *Ganesha* imposes a precondition that he would do so only if *Vyasa* would narrate the story without a pause. *Vyasa* set a counter-condition that *Ganesha* understand the verses first before transcribing them. Thus *Vyasa* narrated the entire *Mahābhārata* and all the *Upanishads* and the 18 *Puranas*, while Lord *Ganesha* wrote.

Kautiliya's Arthashastra

The *Arthashastra* is an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy, written in Sanskrit. Likely to be the work of several authors over centuries, Kautilya, also identified as Vishnugupta and Chanakya, is traditionally credited as the author of the text. The latter was a scholar at Takshashila, the teacher and guardian of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. Composed, expanded and redacted between the 2nd century BCE and 3rd century CE, the *Arthashastra* was influential until the 12th century, when it disappeared. It was rediscovered in 1905 by R. Shamasastri, who published it in 1909. The first English translation was published in 1915.

The title "Arthashastra" is often translated to "the science of politics", but the book *Arthashastra* has a broader scope. It includes books on the nature of government, law, civil and criminal court systems, ethics, economics, markets and trade, the methods for screening ministers, diplomacy, theories on war, nature of peace, and the duties and obligations of a king. The text incorporates Hindu philosophy, includes ancient economic and cultural details on agriculture, mineralogy, mining and metals, animal husbandry, medicine, forests and wildlife.

Hiuen Tsang

Hiuen Tsang was a Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller, and translator who travelled to India in the seventh century and described the interaction between Chinese Buddhism and Indian Buddhism during the early Tang dynasty. During the journey he visited many sacred Buddhist sites in what are now Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. He became famous for his seventeen-year overland journey to India (including Nalanda), which is recorded in detail in the classic Chinese text *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, which in turn provided the inspiration for the novel *Journey to the West* written by Wu Cheng'en during the Ming dynasty, around nine centuries after *Hiuen Tsang's* death.

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