

RELEVANCE OF VEDANTA IN MODERN WORLD

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(1) PRINCIPLES OF VEDANTA

Etymologically, Vedanta means the end or the conclusion of the Vedas. Thus the last portions of the Vedas-the Upanishads and the principles or philosophy propounded in them-are called Vedanta. In fact, Vedanta is a system of philosophy, which forms the basis of Hinduism. There are different interpretations of the Upanishads based on which there are various schools of Vedanta like- Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita. Generally, the Advaita philosophy as propounded by Sankaracarya is equated with Vedanta.

The primary source of Vedanta is the Upanishad. However certain portions of Vedanta have been derived from some of the earlier aranyakas. The main principle of Vedanta is the absolute reality that has been termed as Brahman. Sage Vyasa was one of the major proponents of this philosophy. Most schools of Vedanta believe in the concept of Brahman - the eternal, self existent and inspiring Supreme and Ultimate Reality which is the divine ground of all Beings. There are six interpretations of these source texts. Among these six three (Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita) are well-known. These Vedanta schools of thought were founded by Shri Adi Shankara, Shri Ramanuja and Shri Madhvacharya. Bhagavad Gita has also played a major role in Vedantic thought. All teachers of Vedanta have completely attested to the importance of Gita to the development of Vedantic thought and practice. Vedanta is not restricted to one book, thus it has no single source.

Vedanta says that Brahmn is ultimate reality. All other beings and things are unreal. Swami Sivananda upholds that Brahmn is paripoorna, full, because all desires melt there. Brahmn to him 'is something, after seeing which there is nothing more to be seen, after becoming which there is nothing more to become,

after knowing which there remains nothing to be known'. Brahm is that which is all-pervading, which surrounds us from all sides – around, above and below. It is satchidananda or existence, knowledge and bliss. It is that which has no other. It is without a second, endless, eternal, one and one alone. It is everlasting, the one continuous experience-whole. Brahm has six attributes: 'jnana (divine wisdom), vairagya (dispassion), aishwarya, power (bala, strength), sri (wealth); and kirti (fame)'.

Brahm is swatantra or independent. He has satkama (good desires) and satsankalpa (pure will). Since karmas are jada or insentient, on their own they cannot yield fruits, so it is Brahm who dispenses fruits of actions of jivas. He is all merciful; quenching the thirst of jivas. He satiates our hunger. He dispenses justice to all. The five activities of God are: srishti (creation), sthiti (preservation), samhara (destruction) tirodhana or tirobhava (veiling) and anugraha (grace). Brahm is beyond the reach of the senses and mind that is why its existence cannot be proved by scientific experimentation. It is purely a question of faith and refers to the intuitive side of man. However, His existence can be inferred by certain empirical facts or common experiences in daily life.

He is nitya (eternal), ananta (infinite), and ananda (supreme bliss). He is unchanging amidst changing phenomena. He is permanent amidst the impermanent, and imperishable amidst the perishable. He is what the Gita calls "Jyotishamapi tat jyoti, Light of all lights" He is the Adhithana or support of the phenomenal world. Brahm is the sutradhara, string-puller of all bodies of beings. He is the antaryamin, inner ruler of all beings. He is in you and you are in Him. Each of the five primary elements is a manifestation of His qualities.

Vedanta is as old as the Vedas and is the basis of the various Indian philosophical systems. Although Vedanta had always been a practical scheme of life as well for modern world Swami Vivekananda has given it a new interpretation called Practical Vedanta. Self-enquiry is greatly emphasized in Vedanta, where it is called tvam-pada-sodhana. When one asks the questions,

Who am I? What is my real nature? And seeks answers to such questions one ultimately realizes one's real pure conscious nature-the Atman free from adjuncts like- body, mind, ego and intellect.

The best-known and most influential of the schools of Vedanta is that of Shankara (AD 788–820), known as the nondualist or *advaita* Vedanta. Shankara attempted to show that the teaching of the Upanishads was a self-consistent whole. According to Shankara, the ultimate reality is Brahman or the Self, which is pure reality, pure consciousness, and pure bliss. The world has come into being from Brahman and is wholly dependent on it. The criteria of reality are immutability and permanence. Since the world is constantly changing, and since its existence is not absolute but dependent on Brahman, the world is called illusion or *maya*. Brahman exists as the Absolute, without qualities (*nirguna*), and also exists with qualities (*saguna*) as a personal god, *Ishvara*, who presides over the world of appearance. Shankara divided the Veda into two sections, that dealing with duties and ritual actions (*karmakanda*) and that dealing with knowledge of reality (*jnanakanda*) contained in the Upanishads.

Spiritual liberation is achieved not by ritual action, which is for those of inferior spiritual capacity, but by eradication of the ignorance (*avidya*) that sees the illusory multiplicity of the world as real, and by attainment of knowledge of the Self. The qualified nondualism or *vishishtadvaita* of Ramanuja (1017–1137) argued against Shankara, holding that Brahman is not devoid of qualities, but rather is the possessor of divine qualities. The world and individual souls are not illusion, but have intrinsic reality, although they are dependent on God. Ramanuja, a worshiper of Vishnu, advocated devotion or *bhakti* as a means of salvation. The dualist or *dvaita* Vedanta of Madhva (1197–1276) attacked the monistic followers of Shankara and defended a pluralist standpoint. He asserted the permanently separate reality of the world, souls, and God, who is identified with Vishnu. Vedanta in one or the other of its forms has had a pervasive

influence on the intellectual and religious life of India, and it is still a living tradition. Well-known modern Vedantists include Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Swami Vivekananda, and Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo).

Advaitins believe that suffering is due to Maya (also known as Mithya or Vaitathya), and only knowledge (called Jnana) of Brahman can destroy Maya. When Maya is removed, there exists ultimately no difference between the Jiva and Brahman (Isvara). Such a state of bliss when achieved while living is called Jivanmukta. While one is in the pragmatic level, one can worship God in any way and in any form, like Krishna or Ayyappa as he wishes; Adi Shankara himself was a proponent of devotional worship or Bhakti. But Adi Shankara taught that while Vedic sacrifices, puja and devotional worship can lead one in the direction of jnana (true knowledge) they cannot lead one directly to moksha. At best, they can serve as means to obtain moksha via shukla gati.

(2) PRESENT SCENARIO OF MODERN WORLD

Today the entire modern world is witnessing a horrifying situation because of territorial conflicts, religious fundamentalism, violation of human rights, global terrorism, environmental and ecological imbalances, global warming, economic disparity etc. We are aware of the fact that, in spite of mind-boggling scientific and technological advancements along with astonishing materialistic developments, the world is passing through a very crucial phase of uncertainty and fear complex arising out of violence, terrorism and variety of conflicts. **Well known scientists, thinkers, philosophers, educationists, academicians, spiritual leaders and socially committed people are feeling urgent necessity of establishing culture of peace throughout the Globe.** Now the time has come to follow the words of the great noble son of India Swami Vivekananda, "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved". Our aim is to bring this statement into reality and to rotate the wheels of change to make the movement of establishing "culture of peace" more proactive.

We are not living in isolated compartments, the modern world has become one family. In a society plagued with domestic and communal violence, we need to globalize wisdom. Though we have advanced technologically, we have cared very little for the emotional and spiritual needs of people. A sense of belongingness with the whole modern world-rising above the narrow considerations of colour, culture or back ground, is the need of the hour. We need to look back and learn from the mistakes of the past, we need to understand what is lacking in society and how we can nurture the human values without which his earth cannot be sustained.

At the outset we have to acknowledge that the man of today is living in a modern world, which is much more complex than that of an ancient or mediaeval man. Independence among nations has increased; and this has brought an ever widening and deepening impact on the economic, intellectual and social conditions of our existence. The scientific advancement has made countries one another's neighbours. Divergent races, divergent cultures and divergent outlooks have come in close relations. Jaina ethics has both the eyes of the individual as well as the social betterment. Social dependence cannot rob the individual of his freedom to achieve his spiritual individuality. Thus the true view recognizes that the individual and society influence each other. The individual moulds and is moulded by society.

As we know that the entire modern world is passing through a tense and chaotic stage, never before noted in the history of human civilization. Conflicts, clashes, violence, bloodshed and massacre have become the order of the day, practically in all parts of the modern world. In spite of mind-boggling scientific and industrial developments like nano-technology, artificial intelligence, space research etc., the situation is worsening day by day. Even though the present scientific innovations and technological advancements have converted this modern world of ours into a global village on the face of it, but the hearts and

minds have drifted far apart with deep differences being created between man and man, one nation and the other, one religion and the other and between different sexes, races and castes. If we don't take urgent action for promoting the culture of peace, it will be too late; there is imminent threat to the human life and mother nature.

Long after this another Nobel physicist, Paul Dirac, followed Einstein. He said not only this is a kind of energy but the whole modern universe is a field of energy. What I call this tape recorder is a kind of energy field. Every electron, which we call as matter, is a kind of energy field. Everything in the modern world is a field of energy. You are a field of energy, the fan moving here is a field of energy, the electrons inside are fields of energy. The whole modern worlds, I am using the word, worlds the visible world of ours and the invisible world which is beyond our sight are only different fields of energy. And these fields of energy are clashing with other fields of energy. The whole universe is an ocean of energy, Praanastvam.

Upanishadic rishis understood it by meditation 4000 years earlier and said the final truth of existence is a field of energy and Einstein took off exactly these sentences and quoted every thing and says in the ultimate analysis there is not field of energy and matter. There is no matter at all. It is only field. Field, field, field. The whole universe is an ocean of energy.

(3) RELEVANCE OF VEDANTA IN MODERN WORLD

Vedanta's main contribution to humanity has been its catholicity of outlook, spirit of tolerance and its quest for inner freedom that defies imposition of any limit of race, colours, creed, etc. Swami Vivekananda, a sage well – known throughout the world for his practical wisdom, envisioned Vedanta as a teaching that would save the modern world from imminent spiritual death. Teachings of

Vedanta remind the modern man in distress that unless he accepts and realizes spirituality as the core dimension of his personality, he won't be able to live a peaceful life in spite of his tremendous material progress. For Dharma, the moral force that can hold society together is possible only in an atmosphere of “toned down materialism” and assertion of the Spirit. It is futile to try to find peace outside if we have not found it inside.

Swami Vivekananda asserts that “Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries forever; any other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time. It is only with the knowledge of the spirit that the faculty of want is annihilated. . . .” In the present age, the modern world has been united on the material plane by western technology. But this western skill has not only ‘annihilated distance,’ it has armed the peoples of the modern world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way.

Today we need to follow the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda, one of whose missions was to remove the cults from the oft-projected picture of Hinduism and give an invigorating message of Vedanta to both the East and the West Modern World. **When our religion is thus made comprehensible to the man of modern world, when the practices incompatible with Vedanta are purged, when our education is spiritualized through de-secularization, when our nation gets united by the application of Vedanta, only then will Hindus be able to impress the Modern world outside.** Only then can our Acaryas deliver what is expected of them – showing how to have the correct attitude to solve modern and ultra-modern problems: pollution, population explosion, escalating terrorism, ecological imbalance, unprecedented pauperization of man, ‘genetic

bomb' etc. Only then the song of the Puranic ballad will have significance today : The residents of the celestial sphere sing, and the theme of their song is the following: 'Blessed are those that live in the territory of 'Bharata.' Let us, by our act and deed, justify our love for 'Bharata' which may mean rata, or addicted, to bha, or enlightenment.

The simple truth is that every one of us belongs to this modern universe and the modern universe belongs to us. The all human beings are small part of this great modern universe. Then why this disunity, why this mutual hatred. Why this mutual suspicion? According to Vedic philosophy, "God conveyed his message through his messengers that we are all his own creation. Does this message not enjoin us to live in unity, peace and harmony? We all are equal in his eyes. Why should we then create differences and manipulate things to act against God's design? The time has arrived when we should come close to each other for realizing the one modern world dream.

For example, take the burning question of ecology, which has been increasingly agonizing our minds for the last 30 years. What clue does the ancient wisdom of Vedanta offer us to solve this ? Vedanta will simply point out that man needs a change of attitude first, by shedding the belief that he a right to use or misuse nature as he chooses in the pursuit of his happiness; and that this change is best brought about by accepting the Vedantic epigram: Thou art That! Man is inseparable from nature and whatever man inflicts on nature he inflicts on himself.

Peace and harmony in the modern world will come through brotherhood and love. With true enlightenment a person rises above the level of boundaries of race, religion, language or nation. Unless our mental horizon and perception is broad we cannot achieve success in life. Due to our ignorance we

are trying to establish the superiority of our own race and religion. The cause of modern world dangerous situation is the ignorance of mankind . It is by understanding the spirit of "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**" that world peace can be ushered in this modern world. Today the modern world is on the verge of total destruction. Every country in the world, in the name of peace and self defence, has accumulated weapons of mass destruction. But through such weapons peace cannot come in this modern world. In this dangerous situation respect for all religions and "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**" can usher peace in this modern world.

All of us have forgotten our ethos, culture, concepts of morality and ethics and the good traditions. The time tested human values and spirit is missing. The unfortunate part is that this is taking place in spite of a well devised education system. The values of bygone era, which helped this planet earth to sustain over the ages, are missing. Once the value system is missing, then there is no difference between the human beings and the other creatures. It is highly desirable to change the mindsets of the people so as to inculcate the time tested human values.

We are about to enter a new modern era, which will see the dawn of a new divine civilization on earth. Let us now try not to divide the people into smaller sects or sections but unite them to accept one religion, one God and one humanity. Remember, we are an integral part of God. All religions emphasize moral and spiritual values of love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness and good conduct.

(4) CONCLUSION

The basic teachings of all religions are same. Prophets of all religions have stressed upon the need of knowing and realizing God by following his teachings. Vedas say, for wise people, the entire humanity is but one family. Ramayana preaches God is present in all human beings. **The Gita teaches, "Be**

involved in the good of all humanity". According to Jainism "Do not indulge mind, body and speech in the evil of all other creatures." According to Islam, " O God! give prosperity to all humanity." According to Guru Granth Saheb, "All humanity has sprung from light of one source i.e. God. Who is big, who is small? i.e. all are equal. Bible teaches, "Love thy neighbor and the world is but family. All religions give the same divine message of unity of God. All schools should, therefore, teach children to follow the teaching of all prophets. **From the first day in school, a child should learn that God is one, religion is one, humanity is one.**

There are countless persons or organizations in the modern world who advocate modern world peace and world unity. Our forefathers were great visionaries for advocating modern world peace and world unity. Therefore, they incorporated article 51 in the constitution of India to enjoin the Government to work for the unity of mankind in the spirit of our ancient belief of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**. Taking a clue from this article of the constitution of India we should try to build a global opinion for formation of a Modern World Parliament and Modern World Government, so that the entire modern world become one country and the mankind its citizens. All wars will come to an end when the modern World Government is framed. The existing stockpile of nuclear weapons will be destroyed by the Modern World Government thus formed. A new modern era of everlasting peace will then prevail on earth, ushering in a new civilization. Come, let us all join in this Modern World Government movement. Humanity will forever remember India for bequeathing to it the ideal of **Vasudhiva Kutumbakam**.

National and international activities of a country should be guided by the principle of non-violence and *Anekanta*. In order that country may function properly without encroaching upon the inherent spiritual nature of man, it must identify itself with *samyagdarasana*, *samyaggyana* and *samyag chritra*. The

policy of the country must exhibit unflinching faith in, and tenacious adherence to the principle of non-violence. This will crown the country with *samyagdarsana* which will ipso facto bring enlightenment to it, and result will be the emergence of *samyaggyna*. In other words, the adoption and assimilation of *Anekanta* is *samyaggyna*. The resolute and astute application of the policy of non-violence and *Anekanta* in the national and international spheres for solving all sorts of problems will credit the country with *samyagchritra*. The passions of fear, hatred towards any other country, the passions of deception, greed to expand its territory and to usurp other country's wealth and freedom, the passions of pride of wealth, power, achievement and heritage—all these should be banished from the country, because they are corruptive of the veritable spirit of progress. **On the positive side, the country should pursue the discipline which flows from *samyagdarsana*, *samyaggyna* and *samyagchritra*.**

Every creature of globe wants to live and no body likes to die. Therefore no one has any right to destroy or harm any other living being. Jain ethics believes non-violence means universal truth. There is only one caste namely manhood. Jainism teaches us "Attainment of total freedom from the cycle of birth, life, pain, misery, death and achieving the blissful state of one's pure self, unity, tolerance, non-violence, truthfulness, chastity, complete detachment from people, places and material things. Lord Mahavira's teachings are to highlight the importance of practicing unity, non-violence and giving up anger, egoism, deception, greed and similar vices to be able to attain salvation.

Renouncing selfish desire is the highest state of renunciation. When such divine state is achieved, one dedicates oneself to the service of mankind. Only a selfless person is worthy of leading the mankind. A selfless person belongs to no particular nation, religion or culture. Such a selfless person is a citizen of the modern world. Let us follow selfless person for achieving one world dream. Culture of peace in the world can be achieved and maintained by renouncing negative ideas of anger, pride, hypocrisy and greed. Propagate

non-violence as means to resolved any dispute, conflict or all sorts of issues, differences arising out of caste, creed, race, religion and the boundaries of nations by mutual discussions, deliberations and dialogues in the society, following in footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi.

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