

ASPECTS OF INDIAN HERITAGE

India is a vibrant democracy, dynamic economy with a great potential as it has a population of 1.3 billion people of whom more than 65% are below the age of 35 years. It is a young country but an ancient civilization that has successfully withstood the vicissitudes of time. While the country has embraced modern science and technology beliefs that come from its civilizational thought are ingrained in the people.

Human Way of Life

Indians call their culture “Manav Dharma” or “manavasanskriti” that is human way of life, which has been made so comprehensive that all can derive something from it. It has never tried to convert anybody but its inclusiveness, plurality, flexibility and the power of its ideas, have taken it beyond the shores of India.

The vitality of Indian culture lies in its catholicity by which mutually contradictory creeds live peacefully together. The Ultimate Reality is Shunya (nothing) for the Nihilists, Brahman for the Vedantist, Purusha for Sankhya philosophers, Ishwara for the followers of Yoga, both Self and Not-Self, something in between for the Madhyamikas, and “All” for others. All prayer is to the Ultimate Power that pervades the universe by whatever name called Anekantavada articulates the thought that people are bound to differ in their views and judgements about the same object. Its corollary is Syadvada or restraint in making judgements because these can only be partial and not absolute truths.

Integral to its multiplicity and diversity is the readiness of Indian culture to interact with other cultures and to accept and accommodate their aspects into itself. There has been much give and take between Greeks and Indians. India welcomed Christianity within the first century of its birth. In medieval times, it absorbed elements of Islamic culture. And soon after contact with Europeans, it began to absorb the best in the modern scientific civilization of the West.

Concept of a Human Being

In Indian thought, a person is seen as the microcosm of the whole or macrocosm. Therefore, an individual can only understand his relationship with the universe and other beings by studying and understanding his own self. Human beings share natural traits with animals motivated by instincts, or pravrittis. But unlike animals, they have Buddhi or intelligence to discriminate between proper and improper in the exercise of natural propensities, strengthen some and weaken others while delaying the satisfaction of some others.

According to Indian thought, human consciousness has three main aspects: awareness or gyana; desires and emotions or ichcha; and action or kriya. All three have to be perfected through yoga – yoga being nothing but the discipline of mind and its instincts to enable an individual to understand himself, his environment and his relation with all beings around him. Gyana yoga widens his consciousness; bhakti yoga controls his desires and emotions and karma yoga teaches him righteous and disinterested performance of his duties in action. This is the triune path explained in the Gita. Other kinds of yoga include Hatha Yoga for control and perfection of body; Kundalini Yoga, to awaken the dormant and potential powers

beyond consciousness; and Raja-Yoga to experience of Samadhi through gradual concentration of the mind.

The yogas do not depend only on sensory observation but refine and perfect the processes of introspection, intuition and Samadhi or mystic experience. They make one realize that an individual is the centre of a circle whose circumference is nowhere i.e. it is infinite. Also, in his deeper nature, he is identical with the deepest spirit that sustains and pervades the universe. In his ultimate essence he is one with the essence of the world. Hence the Upanishads boldly proclaim Ayam Atman Brahman or this Self is the Absolute Reality; or Aham Brahmasmi or I am the Absolute, or Tat Tvam Asi or That thou art.

Interconnectedness

All creation being rooted in the same Brahman, is necessarily interconnected although apparently isolated on the surface. That is why Isha Upanishad states that whosoever beholds all beings in the same Self and the same Self in all beings does not hate anybody. When a man knows that all beings are ultimately the Self and realizes this unity in experience, then there remains no delusion or grief for him.

However, such a realisation can only come, through an awareness of the various experiences that every individual passes through because of the structure of his being. He has three shariras or bodies. He is the physical body or the annamayasharira through which he functions in his waking state. The subtle body or the Sukshmarsharira is constituted by the pranas or the vital energies, sensory and motor powers or gyananendriyas and karmendriyas and the subtle elements of mind, intelligence and ego. Through this, an individual functions both in the waking and in the dream state. Finally, the causal body or the karanasharir which is the deep

sleep state when all cognizance comes to an end but potentialities remain. All of us pass through all the three states everyday in our lives giving a variety to our experiences.

Karma and Reincarnation

These experiences can be used to explain the idea of karma and reincarnation. Just as we return from deep sleep to the waking stage so also after death we come back to the world. This is the law of karma. The belief is that all our voluntary thoughts and acts are rewarded or punished according to the law of justice called *Rtata* that operates in the cosmic order. The universe is not a haphazard mass of elements and events, but an ordered whole according to the inflexible laws of harmony, to which all is subordinate from the vast galaxies down to the nucleus of an atom.. Cosmic justice being part of cosmic order creates a strict balance of action and reaction. The personality of the doer never dies. It comes back and can evolve learning its lessons or it can continue till it learns them. There would be chaos and rule of injustice in the universe if a person were to cease to exist without undergoing the consequences of his deeds both good and bad. This in essence is the law of karma and reincarnation.

Four Goals of Life

There are four purushastras or goals to guide the individual through life. These are dharma or duty, artha or wealth, kama or desire including sexual desire, and moksha or ultimate liberation from all desire. There are many interpretations of these terms but in essence, any thought or action that supports, nurtures, consoles, and uplifts is

dharmic or right conduct. Hence, it is human duty to attain wealth and fulfil desires but in a way that is dharmic, that is it must sustain and contribute to the good of all. And moksha is not some sterile cessation of desire but a state of perfect equilibrium, indifference to both pain and delight; like and dislike; without any prejudices or biases aware that everything is rooted in the self same Brahman.

Conclusion

The final resolution to all ambiguities and contradictions is the reliance on one's own Buddhi or reason or intelligence to determine the truth or falsity of a judgement. The greatest prayer in the Vedas, the Gayatri Mantra, that asks for inspiration for right and proper dharma so that there is harmony and balance between the aspirations of the individual and that of society.

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