

Contemporary Approach to Sanatana Dharma

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Introduction:

Hinduism is one of the oldest major world religions. Presently there are more than Seven hundred twenty million Hindus exist. Most of them are in India, Nepal, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Indonesia and also in few other countries also. Hinduism is estimated as several thousand years old and holds the distinction of being the most ancient of the World's living religions. It is difficult to determine the exact age of Hinduism. It is older than Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism. The ancestors of Hindus were also known as Aryans. They called their religion as Arya Dharma. The word dharma infers religion or religious duties. The Aryans also called their religion as “Manava Dharma” or the religion of man. It implies the meaning that, it was not the exclusive religion of Aryans, but meant for the whole human kind. Another, name for Hinduism was “Sanatana Dharma” the eternal religion. It illustrates the belief that, religion was based on eternal truths. The name Hinduism came much later. The neighboring country, Persia had a common border with ancient India. It was also known as Aryavarta - the land of Aryans. The common border between Persia ancient India was the river Indus. In Sanskrit, it was also called as Sindhu. The Persians couldn't spell Sindhu correctly. They pronounced it as Hindu. Thus the religion of Aryans was known as Hinduism.

Basis of Hinduism:

There are many challenging questions since the dawn of human evolution. They are:

- Where did the universe come from?
- Who is the creator? What is the relationship between the created and the creator?
- Do we exist after death and what happens?

There are no definite answers to these questions which lead to much speculation. In course of time, some spiritually illumined minds found answers. They were eventually recorded in the scriptures. According to Hinduism scriptures are unique in their ability to reveal truths. Hinduism has the unique distinction of having no known founder. The eternal and super sensuous truths discovered by ancient sages are the foundations of Hinduism. These truths always exist, just like the laws of gravitation had already existed. The sages believed that, the eternal truths and everything in creation had come from God. Since the truths are revealed by God, sages called them “apaurusheya”; not man – made. Various saints and divine incarnations at different periods appeared and enriched Hinduism with their teachings by reinterpreting the earlier scriptural texts they made the religion relevant to the changed times. They also gave validity to the scriptural truths through their own spiritual experiences. It is a fact that, any religion that gathers dust, cobwebs and eventually becomes unusable. Similarly, if the religion can't be updated or cleaned from time to time, it loses its usefulness and can't relate any more to the changed times and people. But it did not happened to Hinduism. In different periods, genuine saints born in India have cleansed, reformed and revitalized Hinduism and made it relevant to their respective periods. It may not be possible if Hinduism had a founder.

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Goal of Hinduism

Hinduism recognizes 4 goals of human life They are:

Kama - satisfying the desire for sense pleasure

Artha – acquisition of worldly possessions

Dharma – Observance of duties

Moksha – Liberation

Among the four, Kama is considered as the lowest because this urge is common to both human beings and animals. Artha is superior to Kama. It is needed to all human beings. These two are rooted in selfishness. Dharma is superior to the above two. It is the moral obligation of the human beings to perform dharma. Moksha can be achieved through the realization of God. It is the invertible goal of human life. In Hindu religion there are Vedas which are also called as revealed texts, Samhitas, Upanishads, Suritis, Darshanas, Puranas, Epics, Gita, Tantras and Agamas.

Origin of Caste System:

In ancient period Aryans were nomadic people. Their wealth and livelihood depend upon raising cattle. They used to keep under shelter during winter and rainy seasons. The shelter of cattle was called as “Gotra”. In course of evolution many 'gotra's arised. Some of them are Bharadvaja and Kashyapa. Thus the descendents of Aryans are called as Hindus. They inherit the gotra or clan through the forefathers or gotrapatis. The division of caste system was originally based on career potential of the individual. Keeping this as the criteria, the 4 fold caste system was emerged and hierarchy has been followed. In course of evolution this disparity leads to many evils like jealousy, hatred and conflicts. In addition to this since 327 B.C., India was repeatedly invaded by many foreign invasions like Greeks, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Afgans, Persians, Mongols, Portuguese, French and British. From 13th Century onwards Muslims ruled greater part of India nearly Six hundred years till Britishers took over the power at the end of 18th Century. All these invasions, many years of foreign rule and passage of time left tremendous impact on Hindu Society. As a result, Society changed and caste system also changed along with it. After India becoming independent, the Government has given equal access to its citizens for higher education irrespective of caste, color, sex or religion. In addition to this Hindu saints and social reformers like Chaitanya, Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi strongly disapproved the decadent caste system and its evils.

Hinduism as a Sanatana Dharma, it has one of the main features: Caste System is a black dot on its broad principles. Hindus have to be apologetic because of this. Perhaps it was wondering a religion that claimed to be a world religion based on monism and preaches that everything is Sachidananda Svarupa can have caste as one of its major features. It not only differentiates human beings but also make some people as a low class and inhumanly. It is very much speculative whether the caste system a creation of Hinduism and whether the upper category, Brahmins are responsible for the creation of caste. Above all, it is very much speculative that, all these misconceptions are created by the people who have selfish interests to denigrate Hinduism. It is a notion that faith starts where logic ends and faith is not against logic or reason. The two basic principles of Hinduism are; one should not accept anything unless one is satisfied with truthfulness and experience.

India is being praised because of its greatest democracy. But it is fact that our democracy is not real but its caricature. The main reason for this is the failure of our leadership during the post independence period. The people and its leaders during the past, placed creed, caste and personal ends

above the country. If they are selfless, they would have relieved the nation from degradation and restore its original purity. It failed to create the moral earnestness in establishing the ethical state. It has also failed to understand the futility of its attempt in creating the healthy system of governance with unhealthy mind, a secular state out of non secular ethos and a meaningful framework out of a democracy with exploitable citizens at its base.

In Indian democracy the laws are applicable to the citizens of the state. They are divided into three categories like Civil, Criminal and Personal. The Civil and Criminal Laws in that domain of the state, the personal laws are supported to the in the domain of religion. The state interferes in both the institutions. In addition to this, separate minority Institutions have emerged. They are bestowed with special rights. All these things are being done in the name of secularism. It results to national disintegration. Even though officially caste system was abolished, the nation is divided into caste and sub castes, classes and tribes. Morality and ethos is at the minimum level. Corruption is at the highest level in bureaucracy and also in politics. Along with this human nature also changed. People became mechanistic and showing more inclination towards material possessions. They have totally forgotten their ultimate goal of life, self realization. The influence of west and their material civilization made man to feel that happiness can be brought through money and power. Due to this influence, even though we got good education, we developed slavish mentality, and started despising our own culture, religion, our civilization and heritage. We even started looking towards the west for interpreting our religious books and history. For Example: The Aryan invasion theory of Indian and Chronology of dates fixed for Vedas. Even though we find ourselves in an absurd situation because of the acceptance of the invasion theory and the chronology dates of Vedas still many other authoritative works are holding on to the same.

In the present era some of the Hindus are not treating all human being on equal footing. They practice the hierarchy of the caste system and divide the people on the caste basis which is a black dot to the humanity. It has been ascertained on the basis that they are maintaining it for purifying the race. It is a fact that no world religion supports violence and bifurcation of people basing certain criteria. It should be always noted and kept in mind that, no religion can be understood in the narrow sense. Perhaps it is way of life to be followed by the whole universe and in that sense it can be called as a universal religion. If any religion is dogmatic and shallow minded insisting on its own deity or prophet and won't tolerate other deities or prophets, it won't last long. Such kind of religions considers and calls Santana Dharma as communal, because most of the Hindu intellectuals are the manasaputras of the West.

Conclusion:

Thus the present crisis in human affairs is mainly due to the profound crisis in human consciousness. It is a lapse from the organic wholeness of life. Unlike Christianity and Islam, the Hindu religion and its authorities lost the grip due to many reasons. No one tries to understand the principles and values that are present in Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. It will be very glaring when we look into the sound practice in Christianity. The Christians regularly expounding on the scriptures as a part of their Sunday services. The slavish mentality of Indians expect anything to be endorsed by the Westerners is correct. Due to the Western influence, the age old practice of joint family; one of the inherent features of Hinduism is being given up. The Hindus ignored the advantages of joint family system where children are brought up and taught the family culture, ethical values, tradition and civilization that made them fit to live as Universal human beings and not selfish individuals. There are large-scale conversions carried out by the religious minority communities especially by the Christian missionaries from Hinduism to their religions. It infers the replacement of universal religion-

Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism. Perhaps there are many paths in Hinduism to reach the ultimate goal. The individual can choose any of the paths. In other religions, there is only path. But it is very much doubtful whether they facilitate to establish peace in the contemporary world. Only in Sanatana Dharma pleasures are differentiated from happiness. In other religions no distinction was made between them. Materialism tells us to enjoy life through the physical enjoyment to the maximum extent; spiritualism directs to spurn the enjoyments. Sanatana Dharma neither asks its followers to give up their enjoyment nor to enjoy life without any control, but it advises the individual to enjoy life within the limits of ethical and moral grounds and also controlling their senses. Then only it is possible for the individual to reach the ultimate goal.

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