

Dharma-Tattva.

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✓ 'धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायाम्'

The term *Dharma*, which is Sanskrit, has been seriously misunderstood. People wrongly interested in other religions made it their business to belittle Hinduism, and in furtherance of that aim, the very first step taken was to translate the all-important term *Dharma* as *Religion*; this led on in due course to the standing joke against Hinduism that 'the Hindu regards *eating* and *drinking* and other equally unimportant things as *Religion*.' This was and is quite true, but only in the sense that for the Hindu, *Dharma* embraces within its fold every form of activity. In this sense, 'Duty' would have been a more appropriate rendering of *Dharma* than 'Religion', as the connotation of the term 'Religion' is confined to the relation of man with God and other more or less supernatural matters. For the Hindu, on the other hand, there is nothing 'supernatural', and the connotation of the term *Dharma* takes within itself all that man *should do*. The most scientific definition of *Dharma* has been provided for us by our most ancient Sūtrakāras. 'चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः'—says Jaiminī, which means that *Dharma* is that which has been taught in the Veda as being conducive to what is desirable. This has been further clarified by Kaṇāda:—'यतोऽयुद्घनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः', *Dharma* is that which is conducive

to the fulfilment of *Abhyudaya*—Prosperity, Exaltation—and *Niḥśreyasa*—Highest Good, Liberation. It will be noted that Kaṇāda has widened the scope of *Dharma*. Jaiminī had confined it to what is *taught in the Veda* as conducive to desirable ends; while Kaṇāda's definition does not confine it to what is *taught in the Veda*—anything that is conducive to welfare in this world and Final Liberation is *Dharma*. Naturally with these definitions before him, the Hindu came to look upon every act of his,—*i. e.*, every duty of his,—as 'Dharma', and true to this definition our Dharma-Śāstras, Law-books, felt called upon to lay down rules of conduct for all our activities, from the most insignificant to the most sublime, ranging from morn to eve and from eve to morn,—nay, from birth to death and again to another birth and another death, and so on *ad infinitum*.

These books are full of precepts for all occasions, and they are clear and concise, too; but since about 1000 A. D. our ideas of *Dharma* began to be confused by an attempt to reconcile the apparently divergent teachings propounded by the Law-books. People began to lose sight of the fact that particular Law-books—called Smṛtis—had been promulgated at different far-removed times and in different far-removed places; variations and even contradictions among

them were, therefore, inevitable. But while knowing this, writers on Law began the impossible task of reconciling even the irreconcilable teachings and in this attempt they distorted not only the simple meanings, but also the very words of the ancient texts. Even as early as the sixth century A. D., Kumārila recognized these variations and several pages of his *Tantravārtika* have been devoted to the consideration of the question as to whether all the Smṛtis are to be regarded as of universal application, true for all time and place, or only some are so and the rest have only local application; and in the final conclusion, it is only the *Manu-Smṛti* that has been singled out as the most important universal Law-book.

It was due to the above-mentioned confusion that the idea became current which found expression in the well-known saying:—

तर्कोऽप्रतिष्ठः श्रुतया विभिन्ना
नैको मुनिर्यस्य मतं न भिन्नम्
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां.....

“Logic is inconclusive; the *Śruti* texts are divergent; there is no sage whose opinion does not differ. The truth of *Dharma* is hidden in the cave.”

This was true to a certain extent; but it afforded only a cowardly solution for self-created problems. It is quite true that the truth of *Dharma*

is hidden in the cave. But the cave meant here is not the cave in the remote mountain fastnesses; it stands for the cave of our heart, *i. e.*, one's own conscience, the Inner Voice and sense of Right and Wrong. Manu himself, when communicating the right sources of knowledge and *Dharma*, puts at the end ‘आत्मनस्तुष्टिः’, ‘Self-satisfaction’:—

वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलं स्मृतिशीले च तद्विदाम् ।
आचारश्चैव साधूनामात्मनस्तुष्टिरेव च ॥

So also Yājñavalkya:—

‘श्रुतिःस्मृतिः सदाचारः स्वस्य च प्रियमात्मनः ।’

where ‘आत्मनः प्रियं’ stands for Self-satisfaction.

Thus the ultimate source of knowledge, the final sanction, lies in the ‘Cavity of the Heart’, the Inner Voice.

But people generally deceive themselves in seeking the sanction of their own conscience. They wheedle and cajole it and in the end fancy that they have secured its approval; while, all the time, the ‘still small voice’ goes on recording its mild protest.

True to the teachings of the great Kumārila, I would advise every honest seeker of the *Dharma-tattva* to study and study the *Manusmṛti*, which is our *Dharmaśāstra par excellence*. Read it simply and with an unbiassed mind, and I assure you, you will not go far wrong.