

Sanatana Dharma.

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The cause of the present state of downfall of the Hindus lies in the fact that ninety-nine percent among them do not actually know what are the distinguishing features of Sanātana Dharma which they profess, and in professing which they feel a sense of glory and self-gratification. To my mind it appears that if every Hindu knew and understood what is Hinduism, the Hindus of to-day would never have been brought to the present stage of degradation. Every religion possesses a generic form (सामान्यरूप), and a specific form (विशेषरूप). The generic form is not affected by changes of time, place and surroundings, nor by individual differences; it remains eternally the same and is never changed by any circumstance whatsoever. This aspect of religion may be called *Sanātana* (eternal). That which existed before but does not exist now, or will not exist in future—that which changes according to the changes of time, place and surrounding circumstances—is the external aspect, or ritual, of *Dharma*. It is with reference to this external aspect or ritual of *Dharma* that the scripture says:—

अन्ये कृतयुगे धर्मास्त्रेतायामपरे मताः ।
द्वापरे त्वन्य एवोक्ताः कलावन्ये प्रकीर्तिताः ॥

(Mahabharata)

“In Satyayuga, there was a different set of Dharmas or laws; in Tretā they changed into another form; the *Dharma* of Dwāpara is alleged to be different from the *Dharma* of other Yugas; and the *Dharma* of Kaliyuga, too, is stated to be different.”

Just as every individual must pass through the successive stages of childhood, boyhood, youth and old age, and the functions of these stages must be quite different, even so human

society must pass through the successive stages of childhood, boyhood, youth and old age. Man alone is eligible for the pursuit of *Dharma*. And man, whether individually or collectively, is constantly subject to change and transformation. Under such circumstances, it can never be reasonable to suppose that the *Dharma* of Humanity will remain eternally unchanged. Nor do the scriptures maintain such a position. Variability of the *Dharma* of Humanity takes its stand on the variability of human nature. This is an indisputable fact. Keeping this incontestable truth in mind Bhagavān Vedavyāsa unhesitatingly made the declaration as quoted above: ‘अन्ये कृतयुगे, etc.’

Nor did the authors of the Scriptures rest contented with the simple statement that *Dharma* differs from age to age. They have clearly shown how the external form of *Dharma* also undergoes change with the change of *Dharma* in every age. The *Bhāgavata* says:—

कृते यद् ध्यायतो विष्णुं त्रेतायां यजतो मखैः ।
द्वापरे परिचर्यायां कलौ तद्भरिकीर्तनात् ॥

(XII. iii. 52)

“That which is attained through meditation in Satyayuga, through performance of sacrifices in Tretāyuga, and through the worship of Viṣṇu in Dwāpara-yuga, may be attained in Kaliyuga through mere loud chanting of Śrī Hari's Name.”

On the other hand, Mahārṣi Kaṇāda says in his *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras*:—

‘यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः ।’

“That which leads to the attainment of *Abhyudaya* (prosperity in this

world and the next) and *Niṣṣreyasa* (complete cessation of pain) is *Dharma*.''

This definition of *Dharma* given by Mahārṣi Kaṇāda is as broad as it is comprehensive. The generality of men, however, believe that happiness in the other world and complete cessation of pain, or *Nirvāna*, is the only objective of *Dharma*. In their view, happiness in this world is brought about by such well-known means as a garland of flowers to wear round the neck, sandal paste to apply on the body and dainty articles of food and drink. For acquiring these, pursuit of *Dharma* is not at all necessary. In support of this view, they further allege that besides the Śrutis (Vedas) there is no other proof to establish *Dharma*. Mahārṣi Jaimini, the author of the *Mīmāṃsā-Sūtras*, says:—

‘चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः’ ।

That is to say, what the Vedas declare to be the *Artha*, or means of attaining the desired object, is *Dharma*— as for instance the performance of *Agnihotra* (offering oblations to the sacred fire) and other sacrifices such as *Darśa*, *Paurṇamāsa*, etc. For recognizing these as the means of attaining the desired object, there is no authority except the Śruti. What the Vedas alone declare to be the means of attaining the desired object is the Sanātana *Dharma*, or Hindu *Dharma*. According to the *Mīmāṃsakas*, if the Vedas proceed to establish that very thing which is established through other sources such as direct perception or inference, then they will lose their authoritativeness. That which is known through other source is said to be a known object. A proof is that which enables us to know an unknown object. That through the performance of the *Agnihotra* sacrifice we may attain happiness in the other world and the enjoyments of heaven, cannot be known by ordinary means such as perception or inference based on

perception. It is the Vedas alone which declare: ‘अग्निहोत्रं जुहुयात् स्वर्गकामः’— (He who desires heaven should perform the *Agnihotra* sacrifice). The Vedas alone reveal the truth to us that we may attain heaven after death by performing *Homa*, which consists in throwing a definite number of times small quantities of *Ghee* (clarified butter) into the consecrated fire in the name of the Sun-god and the Fire-god, both in the morning and in the evening. Who will deny that this fact could never be known by ordinary means, such as perception, etc., had not the Vedas made it known to us? This establishes that in the matter of *Dharma*, the Vedas are the only authority. The truth about *Dharma* cannot be known through any other source of knowledge than the Vedas. Prosperity in this world, however, can never be attained through the practice of *Dharma* as enunciated by the Vedas. The means of attaining worldly prosperity can be determined by means of ordinary proofs such as perception, inference, and so on. Having known such means, if we take recourse to them we are bound to attain worldly prosperity. If through our own fault we fail to determine the means of attaining worldly prosperity now as well as in future, or even though knowing them we fail to adopt the means through our own inherent defects, we shall fail to attain prosperity. Why should the Vedas be held responsible for this? What has *Dharma* to do with this failure? There is no such relation of effect and cause between worldly prosperity and Sanātana Hindu *Dharma* as enunciated by the Vedas, as may justify our saying that we are being deprived of worldly prosperity because of our failure to observe *Dharma* as laid down by the Vedas. The fact of the matter is, we have not yet been able to determine how we may attain worldly prosperity, or even though

knowing it we cannot adopt the means through our own incapacity. That is why we, Sanātani Hindus, have come to the present state of degradation. The statement that we are not achieving our national progress because we have given up or are giving up the practice of *Dharma*, or because we have become unrighteous and sceptic, does not sound well in the mouth of believers among the Hindus. This is the conclusion of the *Mīmāṃsakas*. And those who guide their life according to this conclusion fail to discover any connection whatsoever between worldly prosperity and *Dharma*; they cannot, therefore, repose their faith in the conclusion arrived at by other Ṛṣis that *Dharma* is that which brings worldly prosperity (*Abhyudaya*) and complete cessation of pain (*Niḥśreyasa*). They refuse to believe that we can attain all manner of worldly prosperity only through the help of *Dharma*, and not otherwise.

In order to bring out that this conclusion is based on a partial truth, and is not supported by the *Śruti*, Maharṣi Kaṇāda has defined *Dharma* as that which brings *Abhyudaya* (prosperity in this world and the next) and *Niḥśreyasa* (complete cessation of pain). That which fulfils both objects, viz., the attainment of worldly prosperity and complete cessation of pain, is *Dharma*. That is to say, that which brings prosperity, but not *Niḥśreyasa*, is not *Dharma*; similarly, that which brings *Niḥśreyasa*, but not prosperity, is also not *Dharma*. This is the implication of the teaching of Maharṣi Kaṇāda. Now, let us consider what is *Abhyudaya*, and what is *Niḥśreyasa*. The word *Abhyudaya* conveys the idea of happiness and the means of attaining happiness; the word *Niḥśreyasa* conveys the idea of cessation of pain or cessation of the cause of pain. The definition of Maharṣi Kaṇāda, therefore, conveys the idea that anything which brings happiness and the means of attaining happiness

within our reach and which leads to cessation of pain and eliminates the cause of pain, is *Dharma*.

We have to fall back on the Vedas for an understanding of the true nature of *Dharma*, which is the extraordinary means of attaining prosperity and bringing about complete cessation of pain. This is because among the scriptures of the world the Vedas are the oldest. This claim is put forward not only by the followers of Sanātana *Dharma*, who acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, but is supported by all leading scholars and antiquarians of the entire civilized world, who declare with one voice that of all books so far written in any human language, the *R̥gveda-Saṃhitā* is incontrovertibly the oldest. It is also well-known to all students of antiquity that no antiquarian has yet succeeded in fixing a date when the *R̥gveda-Saṃhitā*, was composed or came to light. In this very *R̥gveda-Saṃhitā*, we read:—

‘यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त देवास्तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन्’

“The Devas worshipped *Yajña* through the performance of *Yajña* (sacrifice); these sacrifices were first regarded as *Dharma*.”

The meaning of the second *Yajña* (first in the translation) occurring in the text, stands explained in the *Śruti* ‘यज्ञो वै विष्णुः’—‘*Yajña* is the name of *Viṣṇu*.’ The first ‘*Yajña*’ in the text signifies ‘renunciation’. Parting with objects sanctioned for being offered to gods for the pleasure of the Deity is also called *Yajña*—this is well-known to all Vedic scholars. Therefore, the purport of the above *mantra* of the *R̥gveda-Saṃhitā* comes to this that any act of renunciation for the pleasure of *Viṣṇu*, or the all-pervading God, is *Dharma*. Men possessing divine propensities have been following this very *Dharma*.

What is the form of this renunciation? In the last chapter of the *Gītā*

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself has clearly explained to Arjuna the character of this renunciation. He says:—

“Among the wise some say that action itself is an evil, therefore it should be relinquished; while others say that performance of sacrifices, charity and austerity should not be relinquished. O best of Bharatas, hear My conclusion about this subject of renunciation. O lion among men, renunciation is said to be of three kinds. Performance of sacrifices, charity and austerity should not be given up; they should certainly be adhered to, because these three forms of activity purify the heart of wise men. But even these three forms of activity should be carried on without attachment and the desire for fruit; this, O son of Pṛthā, is My decided and most considered opinion.”*

Closely following this, the Lord lays down the character of the threefold renunciation. He says:—

“A duty that is of an obligatory nature should not be relinquished; renunciation of such a duty through perversity is called Tamasic (prompted by ignorance). If anyone abandons a duty from fear of bodily trouble, knowing it to be full of pain, such renunciation is of the Rajasic type. He who makes such renunciation is deprived of the fruit of renunciation. If, on the other hand, an action which is of an obligatory nature is performed

as a duty, renouncing attachment and the desire for fruit, that action itself is regarded as the Sattvic form (purest form) of renunciation.”*

This Sattvic form of renunciation as laid down by the Lord in the *Gītā*, or action performed for the pleasure of God, without a sense of doership and renouncing the desire for fruit, is the Sānātana Dharma of the Hindus. It is this Sattvic form of renunciation which is hinted at by the first *Yajña* occurring in the text ‘यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त, etc.’ of the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* of the *R̥gveda-Saṃhitā*.

While attempting to delineate what is called the highest point of wisdom, the Lord says in the *Gītā*:—

बहूनां जन्मान्मते ज्ञानवाग्मां प्रपद्यते ।
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महत्तमा सुदुर्लभः ॥

“After a series of births, realizing that everything in this world is Vāsudeva, the *Jīva* takes refuge in Me. The *mahātmā* (great soul) who has thus taken refuge in Me is very difficult to find in this world.”

The sacrifice in the form of self-surrender to God, realizing Him to be present everywhere as the soul of all, is the Sānātana Dharma. In all books written on Sānātana Dharma either by the Ṛṣis or by Mahātmās possessing the brilliance of intellect of the Ṛṣis, from the age of the Saṃhitās down to the present day, this has been pointed out as the true form of Sānātana Dharma. According to differences of time, place, individual capacity and

* त्याज्यं दोषवदित्येके कर्म प्राहुर्मनीषिणः ।
यज्ञदानतपः कर्म न त्याज्यमिति चापरे ॥
निश्चयं शृणु मे तत्र त्यागे भरतसत्तम ।
त्यागो हि पुरुषव्याघ्र त्रिविधः संप्रकीर्तितः ॥
यज्ञदानतपः कर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।
यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥
एतान्यपि तु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलानि च ।
कर्तव्यानीति मे पार्थ निश्चितं मतमुत्तमम् ॥

* नियतस्य तु संन्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।
मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः ॥
दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायद्वेषभयात्प्रजेत् ।
स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत् ॥
कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेऽर्जुन ।
सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलं चैव स त्यागः सारिवको मतः ॥

surrounding circumstances, the external practices of Sanātana Dharma assume different forms, but that does not make any change in the *Yajña* of self-abnegation or renunciation of attachment and the desire for self-gratification with the object of pleasing God. Even though the accessories of this *Yajñā* differ in every age and with every individual, the Sanātana Dharma as described above has maintained itself intact from eternity down to the present day. The *Gītā* says:—

“Some perform this *Yajña* through material substances, others through penance in the shape of self-mortification sanctioned by the Śāstras, still others through *Samādhi*, which consists in suspending the functions of the mind, yet others through knowledge in the form of realization of Self in every being, derived from a profound study of the scriptures, while some Ṛṣis perform it through various vows and practices. All these, knowing the embodiment of *Yajñā*, that is Bhagavān Viṣṇu, and performing *Yajña* for His pleasure, are rid of all forms of evil, and eating life-giving ambrosia in the form of remains of this *Yajña*, attain the changeless, eternal *Brahma*.”*

Not only this, the root conclusion is:—

‘नार्यं लोकान्स्वययज्ञस्य कुतोऽन्यः कुरुत्तम ।’

“Whoever fails to perform this *Yajña*, which though one in substance appears varied according to differences in the nature of men, neither attains happiness in this world nor in the next.”

A human being who does not carry out this eternal *Yajña* in any of its varied aspects determined by differences

of time, place and disposition, is no human being at all; it may be said that there is no difference whatsoever between him and the lower animals. Success of human life lies in the observance of this Sanātana Dharma in the form of *Yajña* or self-sacrifice with the object of earning the pleasure of God, and in nothing else. Owing to differences in the nature of men belonging to different ages, the observance of this Sanātana Dharma necessitates a change in its external practices from age to age. That is the fundamental teaching of the Hindu Śāstras, and this is what the *Mahābhārata* seeks to drive at through the statement: ‘अन्ये कृतयुगे धर्माः, etc.’

In the Satyayuga the mind of men is generally pure (Sattvic) and consequently there is no distraction of the mind, so that contemplation of God becomes easy and natural for many. That is why meditation has been pointed out as the principal form of discipline in that age. In the Tretā-yuga, pure materials for the performance of *Yajña* are easily available and the mind exhibits some amount of active propensity (*Rājas*), so that sacrifices like *Agnihotra*, *Darśa-paurṇamāsa*, *Jyotiṣṭoma*, etc., enjoined by the Śrutis are easy to accomplish. That is why *Yajña* has been described as the external form of Sanātana Dharma in that *Yuga*. In the Dwāpara age man is privileged to have close association with God in the form of Avatāras, and there is a greater manifestation of the sportive energy of God in the world, so that there is greater facility for man to practise direct worship of God. It is therefore that we find worship recommended as the principal form of *Sādhana* in that *Yuga*. In the *Kaliyuga* there is paucity of materials prescribed for the practice of *Dharma* in other yugas, and human mind is naturally prone to greater distractions, so that practice of meditation and worship

* द्रव्ययज्ञास्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे ।
स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥
.....
सर्वेऽप्येते यज्ञविदो यज्ञक्षपितकल्मषाः ।
यज्ञशिष्टाभूतमुजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम् ॥

and performance of sacrifices (*Yajña*) becomes difficult. It is therefore that in this *Yuga* loud chanting of the Divine Name has been recommended as the principal practice of Sanātana Dharma, or self-sacrifice for the sake of divine pleasure, suitable for the masses. It is this essential truth of Hindu Dharma which is brought out by scriptural texts like 'कृते यद् ध्यायतो विष्णुं, etc.' All this proves that though the spirit of Sanātana Dharma remains the same in all ages, it is inevitable for its external practices to undergo changes from age to age. Our failure to rise in the scale of *Dharma* lies in the fact that the practice of *Dharma* of the present *Yuga* has not yet been taken up by the masses in the manner it should be taken up, and it is our failure to grow in *Dharma* which is closing all avenues of our progress in this world as well as the next. Every Hindu should make it a point to bear this truth in mind.

Bhagavān Vedavyāsa has stated in the *Mahābhārata* : 'सर्वे शक्तिः कलौ युगे'—in Kaliyuga power will lie in internal union among all branches of Humanity. It is due to total lack of this union that we have remained deprived of all power. The greatest and most important teaching of the scriptures of Sanātana Dharma is that there is no other means in Kaliyuga except the *Kirtana* of the Divine Name to acquire this power of unity. The dazzling glare of Western civilization has blurred the inner vision of our countrymen to day; that is why our identification with the body and the senses is growing from day to day. Egotism and low self-interest

are forcibly dragging us along the ruinous path of unrighteousness (*Adharma*). Without the re-establishment of Sanātana Dharma there is no way to tide over this terrible crisis. In Kaliyuga the foremost practice of Sanātana Dharma is the loud mass chanting of the names and glories of God, shaking off all pride of self. Through this *Kirtana*, our identification with the body will be relaxed, the deadly poison of pride will get neutralized, the dryness and callousness of the heart will disappear. Through this all-uniting *Kirtana*, the All-powerful God, the embodiment of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss, will reveal Himself before us. The Lord Himself says:—

नाहं वसामि वैकुण्ठे योगिनां हृदये न च ।
मङ्गला यत्र गायन्ति तत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ॥

"I do not reside in Vaikunṭha, nor can I stay long in the heart of Yogis absorbed in *Samādhi*. O Nārada, where My devotees assemble and perform the loud *Kirtana* of My Name, I go and stay there."

If the Lord comes and stands in our midst at the time of *Sankirtana*, all our miseries will disappear, our prosperity will then automatically grow, we shall again be recognized as men and the four quarters of the globe will again resound with the cries of victory of Sanātana Dharma. That is why I repeat once more that Sanātana Dharma in Kaliyuga lies in the *Kirtana* of the Names of God, who is the source of all blessings and the allayer of all suffering and sorrow, performed with humility of spirit and regarding oneself lower than even a blade of grass.

