

Sanathana Dharma and Planet Earth

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Global warming is a serious threat to life in the planet. Present efforts are entirely on secular, political and economic considerations. But a spiritual approach would strengthen present programmes. An understanding of Sanathana Dharma would be useful to decide on its relevance.

Sanathana Dharma (SD) is the correct name of Hinduism. Unlike others, Hinduism is not a religion. It has no founder, nor a holy book like the Bible and the Koran. Hinduism is more a “view of life and a way of life”, as propounded by hundreds of sages and saints, who sat in meditation in forests and accessed higher spiritual knowledge from the Cosmos, or was revealed to them from unknown and unknowable sources. These were known as Vedas, which means Knowledge. The end portions of the four Vedas, known as Vedanta or Upanishads, are the philosophical part. These have been handed down to humanity by the sages, who did not even put their names as authors. They were so selfless that they were concerned only with the welfare of mankind, animal kingdom and earth and its endowments. As per astronomical calculations, based on the position of the stars mentioned in Hindu spiritual literature, it is believed that these revelations took place during 10,000 BC to 4,000 BC. Sage Vyasa condensed the essence of the Vedas and Upanishads in 700 verses in the Bhagavad

Gita, which was delivered by Sri Krishna to Arjuna in 3,138 BC in the Kurushetra battle field. Since then, thousands of commentaries have been written by hundreds of sages, saints and scholars on the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Altogether, they form one million pages, all in Sanskrit, and that too, in verse form. Teachings of Upanishads are as messages, which are contained in Ramayana and Mahabharata as experiences. For the sake of easy understanding to the masses, these principles and ideals have been illustrated in story form in the 36 Puranas. In addition, Nithi Sastras and Manusmriti converted these ideals as rules and codes of conduct for mankind.

As per Sanathana Dharma, man is potentially divine, and not a sinner. The object of Sanathana Dharma is to remove sorrow and suffering and to attain happiness and peace as well as to help man to go near God or realize that he is God himself. All these are to be achieved in this birth itself. Among many, one concept of God is that it is Chaitanya or Energy or Force or Consciousness or Universal Soul, which pervades the whole Universe, energizing movements and responses. This Chaitanya enables trillions and trillions of electrons to go round the nucleus as well as make the planets go around the sun and to

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make the sun and billions of galaxies shine and move in the expanding Universe. This Chaitanya is the power that enables the mind to see through the eyes, to hear through the ears, to digest the food which we eat, to make us breathe without our effort, to heal wounds without our interference, etc. It is invisible, formless and nameless. This abstract force is picturized as Gods and Goddesses, or seats of power or as deities or idols of millions of Gods and Goddesses, which are used to worship the Reality behind them. These are only methods and instruments. By surrendering to God, we try to remove sorrow and suffering as well as attain Godhood or Divinity or Godliness. Sanathana Dharma is not affected by what happens outside. Sanathana Dharma is also known as Spirituality, or just Dharma or Righteousness, which together with Ethics and Morals, Philosophy and Religiosity, Acharas and Samskaras, Speculations, etc., are known as Hinduism. It is congregations of ideas. Each can choose what suits his capability and attitude.

The danger to the Planet Earth, due to willful over- utilization, was foreseen in 1950, and mankind was informed in the Club of Rome Report. The first International Conference on Environment was held in 1972 in Stockholm, which warned the nations of the potential dangers of polluting Planet Earth. In the Rio Summit in 1992, and later in the Summit held in South Africa in 2002, action programmes were chalked out by national leaders, who committed to reducing pollution to acceptable levels. The recent International Conference in Copenhagen was attended, among others, by the President of US which shows the importance of Global warming, desertification, pollution, soil erosion, climate change, etc, which are threatening the ability of the planet to sustain life. The present generation is reckless, since future generation

only would suffer. But Sanathana Dharma says that this generation would be punished by the law of Karma.

Most of the preventive and corrective measures taken are based on current experience, such as political considerations, economic compulsion, commercial competition between nations and Corporations, short term profit, unconcern for the future, etc. These have been the dominating motive for such willful exploitation of Planet Earth. Political parties generally act based on short term political gain, and hence do not care for long term implications and ill-effects of their actions on future generations. During the last 20 years, there has been sufficient awareness of the dangers of such assumptions and actions. But the competitive system, economic consideration, need for survival, eagerness to make quick profit, etc have prevented nations and the Corporate Sector to be restrained. It is well known that the industrialized nations are consuming 5 to 10 times more energy than poor countries. Also, they waste 30 to 40 times more than what most Indians do. In 1980, the United Nations initiated programmes for encouraging new and renewable source of energy in order to meet the situation when petroleum resources would be over. A great deal of good R & D work has been going on for tapping atomic energy and renewable sources of energy from Sun, Wind, etc.

The excellent efforts of national governments in this regard are to be appreciated. NGOs and Corporate bodies are reducing wastage and over-consumption. But a cultural, humanistic, ethical, moral and spiritual approach would help institutions, individuals and nations for reducing such reckless exploitation of Planet Earth. Sanathana Dharma has an entirely spiritual approach towards Planet Earth. Indians

worship the planet as Mother Earth, by inculcating reverence, regard and respect to the planet, as Hindus do to Mother. Our ideal of 'Vaastu' is to construct buildings, which shine as ornaments to 'Mother Earth'.

Mother Earth, provides fertile soil to grow food, which sustains us. Air and water are critical for the survival of living beings. Therefore, Sanathana Dharma's approach to all the endowments of other Earth is one of gratitude and worship. All entities of nature are deified on par with Gods. For instance, Sun is considered as a manifestation of God since Sun is the source of all energy on Earth. Worship of the Sun was a common feature among many nations, prior to the Christian era. In Sanathana Dharma, nature's endowments and certain animal species are worshipped. Bhoomi Puja is done before any construction work starts on auspicious occasion.

One part of Vedas is exclusively in praise of Mother Earth and her endowments. There are many hymns in praise of air (Vayu), Sun (Aaditya), Rivers, Mountains, Ether (Aakasha), vital energy (Prana) etc. Even food is worshipped. There is a popular Annapoorneswari temple in Karnataka. Orthodox Hindus go round the Tulsi plant, light a lamp, feed cows and birds, etc, before starting the day. The cow has a special status as deity. In every Shiva temple, Nandi (bullock) vigraha is worshipped first. Most of the popular Gods have animals as their vehicle. Shiva - bullock, Muruga - peacock, Vishnu - Garuda, Ganesha - rat, Ayyappa - tiger, Kaali - lion, God of death - buffalo, etc. Even snakes (Naga) are worshipped in many temples. Ganga, Yamuna, Cauvery, Godavari and other rivers are considered as Mother (Ganga Matha). Ayurveda is based on the organic relationship between man and plant life. Pooja is done to herbs before administering.

Dhanwanthari, the physician, is treated as God of Ayurveda. It is believed that God lives in inanimate matter, wakes up in plant life, walks in the animal, thinks and talks in Man. They are organically linked, totally activated and energized by Chaitanya. One cannot see without the mind, and mind has no power without being energized by Chaitanya.

Sanathana Dharma means "older than the oldest, but still fresh and relevant for all time to come". The nearest meaning of Dharma is Ethics. Ethics also means concern to, and gratitude for, other entities - atoms and galaxies, inanimate and animate matter, ignorant and wise, good and bad - all of which are the two sides of the same coin. A seed weighing one millionth of a gram, becomes a tree. Similarly, the sperm of man and ovum of woman have the design of the whole body. The specific information, intelligence, design and energy, which transform the sperm and ovum to man is called Chaitanya, which is called Brahman or God. Other religions may have equivalent words.

Present efforts - national, institutional, individual, collective, etc - are largely based on secular social science disciplines, such as, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, logic, law, etc. But they ought to be influenced, guided, moderated and imbibed by good Values, such as, ethics, morals, gratitude, honesty, integrity, culture, concern for others and indebtedness to entities on whom we depend for our survival and sustenance, sensitiveness, compassion, humanism, selflessness, sacrifice, suffering, friendliness, partnership, love, affection, respect, regard, commitment, dedication etc.

It so happens that, in history, religions propagated these Values. For instance, the Ten Commandments of Moses, Sermon of the Mount of Jesus, Principles of good Conduct of Zoroaster, Eight Codes of Conduct of Buddha,

Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Dharma Shastras of Hinduism, Sanathana Dharma, Ahimsa of Buddha and Mahaveera, Principles of Tao and other Eastern views of life are 'Values', which cannot be ascribed to, or identified with, any of the conventional and academic social science disciplines. As these belong to the so-called 'religion', these are kept away in academic pursuits and formation of Values amongst children and State policies. Character, which is Dharma, can be considered to be as important (if not more) as competence. The present emphasis is on competence, neglecting character and concern for other entities. Put it differently, selfishness governs the Establishment in all countries, including India. Sanathana Dharma proposes selflessness. TAO says "Selflessness would fulfill selfish desires".

Therefore, solution to preserve Earth lies in following ethical values and programmes, which are to be managed, and not merely preached. Need for Management can be proved in India itself. In no other country are people so religious as Indians, where 80 million go to temples and undertake pilgrimages. In no other country are there so many priests, Sadhus, Swamis and others, all of whom preach ethics through Vedic principles and experiences described in Ramayana and Mahabharata and in story form in the 18 Puranas. And yet, India is a very corrupt country, where there is rampant inequality, and where 400 million are suffering due to malnutrition, poverty, illiteracy, etc. Mere religious preachings have not brought about concern for others, which is Dharma. Ethical and moral values are to be integrated into Management, Public Administration, State policies and political ideology and practices.

The other important element of Sanathana Dharma is philosophy. Unlike the three

Semitic religions, Sanathana Dharma believes that we are the arbiters of our destiny, that we design our own life of joy and sorrow, that we are responsible for our successes and failures etc. These are known as Law of Order and Law of Karma. Everything in the Universe observes the Law of Order. Inanimate matter observes it 100%; So too, plant life. In the case of animals, there is a certain amount of discretion, and therefore, animals observe the Law of Order upto 90% only. Most animal species go by instinct, as they are not endowed with discriminating ability.

In the case of man, he has the freedom to choose between good and bad. Yet, he deviates from Sanathana Dharma to serve his self interests for acquiring wealth or enjoying pleasure. Law of Karma warns mankind that one would be punished either in this birth or in the next birth, if he goes against the principles of Dharma, including his attitude and behaviour towards Planet Earth and her endowments. Other civilizations do not believe in the Law of Karma, and therefore, they think that the Planet Earth is inert and that man can do anything with it.

A word about Vegetarianism is appropriate here. Hundreds of western scholars have researched and written on the ill-effects of non-vegetarian food in character, values, behaviour, etc. Historically, non-vegetarian people have been more cruel than others. Eating of beef in large scale in the West is partially responsible for global warming. 10 kgs of food are fed to cattle to get one kg of meat. Meat produced by cattle is partly responsible for green house effect, global warming, etc. Therefore, eating of beef should be stopped. In Sanathana Dharma, eating of cattle is considered to be the highest form of sin. But in India, 80% of cows are not productive. They also produce methane gas, which is harmful to the environment. More research is required to establish the validity of this finding.

Finally, any human activity can be rendered more efficient and effective, if there are super-ordinate goals. A Christian Missionary works free, since he believes that converting non Christians to Christians is like doing a good to the converted. India's spiritual leaders, like Sai Baba and Amritanandamayi, have millions of followers all over the world, who work free in the service of man kind. Thus, spiritual attitude will give energy, enthusiasm, impetus and inspiration to work towards goals, such as environmental protection and prevention of pollution. But Mao Tse Tung proved that spirituality is not necessary. Even love for the country or love for the Planet Earth can be inculcated in order to inspire people to protect Planet Earth and to work selflessly.

Sanathana Dharma is a holistic approach, where conventional social science disciplines, coupled with principles of Dharma, can help further decline and degeneration of Planet Earth. We have to integrate technology and spirituality, science and spirituality, management and spirituality, administration and spirituality etc. Spirituality is another word for Dharma. Religion is the outer cover, while Spirituality is the inner core, which is fairly common for most religions. Therefore, all religions can join together based on the 'spirituality component', where they have common agreement, and which can give inspiration for effective action in order to preserve Mother Earth from further exploitation.

Let us Whisper more, Shout Less

A saint asked his disciples, 'Why do people shout in anger? Why do people shout at each other when they are upset?'

Disciples thought for a while, one of them said, "Because we lose our calm, we shout for that".

'But, why to shout when the other person is just next to you?' asked the saint.

'Is it not possible to speak to him or her with a soft voice? Why do you have to shout at a person when you're angry?'

Disciples gave some other answers but none satisfied the saint.

Finally he explained, 'When two people are angry at each other, their hearts distance a lot. To cover that distance they must shout to be able to hear each other.

The angrier they are, the stronger they will have to shout to hear each other through that great distance.'

Then the saint asked:

"What happens when two people fall in love? They don't shout at each other but talk softly, why? because their hearts are very close.

The distance between them is very small...." The Saint continued, "When they love each other even more, what happens?

They do not speak, only whisper and they get even closer to each other in their love.

Finally they even need not whisper, they only look at each other and that's all.

That is how close two people are when they love each other."

Let us whisper more and shout less in 2011 !!!

Wish You all a Great New Year with Very Good Health, Wealth and Prosperity.

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