

Hinduism - Then and Now

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The name for Hinduism as given since about 6000 years or so is Sanatana Dharma [eternal laws of virtues]. This Sanatana Dharma was based on the scriptures known as the Vedas but more often referred to in all ancient texts as Sruti. As there was no press or any other tools or equipments for writing down or printing it, this was passed on from generation to generation from Guru to his disciple by rote. Hence it is called Sruti, i.e. that which is heard through the ears. Upanishads were part of these scriptures which recorded the direct experiences of people who devoted themselves wholly to their realisation of the Ultimate Reality which was called as Brahman, as Atman and also loosely as God.

When various communities living in a communal structure formed separate societies and began to live in forests, certain laws were framed based on the Srutis wherein all laws necessary to protect any individual in the society were incorporated. These were called the Smritis and were composed by various maharshis like Atri, Yagjnavalkya, etc. They included how to divide properties between claimants, all the etiquettes like doing prostrations before elders, etc. and how a girl should be brought up and married off, how sanyasa

[renunciation] is to be taken and such like social protections. This was also followed by more elaborate discussions on the various dharmas to be followed by various castes and was called Dharmasastra.

It is the Universal Lord who determined in which caste and in which womb a soul has to be put based on the characteristics developed and the type of activities to which he was conditioned in the previous births as told in Bhagavad Gita, which is a summary or the essence of all the Upanishads.

In order to enable a common ignorant man to understand these basic tenets of Srutis and Smrities, they were written as stories on the disporting of the Lord on this earth [Avataras] and in between bringing the highest philosophy even to the knowledge of a common man through the mouths of the characters in those texts. These were known as Puranas and Ithihasas. Ramayana and Mahabharata were considered as the two mega Ithihasas written by maharshis – Valmiki and Vyasa respectively. Some sects like the madhvas consider these Ithihasas and Puranas as one of the main authorities for origin of philosophy on par with the Srutis while the major sects like the Advaitins do not consider them as the main authority.

Based on these Smrities and Srutis, six systems of philosophies were evolved by great maharshis as follows:

1. & 2. Sankhya and Yoga
3. & 4. Nyaya (Logic) and Vaisesika
5. & 6. Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa (Advaita)

As to think of a Lord without form and attributes was difficult for a common man, theology evolved introducing Gods with forms as in the ancient days of Trojans, Greeks, etc. and the Puranas and Ithihasas were mainly based on these Gods. So that people can choose the Lord whom they like because of the attributes or form and in due course, concentrating the entire day and night on that chosen deity as the Ultimate God himself, one can head towards the destination – the Ultimate Reality. The temples were constructed as representing yagyashalas [the place where yagas and yagnas are conducted] installing any one of the main Gods like Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa, the Divine Mother, etc.

In the earlier days, many of the maharshis used to perform yagas and yagnas which may give specific prosperities like begetting a son in this world, etc. Again even today, rarely in some places those yagnas are conducted for the prosperity of all the people in the world. In the ancient days even though there were enough maharshis engaged only in the remembrance of the Lord, many of those maharshis even used to conduct these yagnas for getting into another imaginary plane called the heavens [swarga] where they are bereft of sufferings [except when fighting with demons (asuras)] and have all entertainments and

enjoyments including women but after their merits done in the last birth are over, they are to have rebirth in this very world.

So the common man in those days was not moksha oriented but was heavens oriented. Nowadays also a common man is oriented to the common way of life of eating, going to the office or running a business and enjoying all objects of pleasure of this world.

Nowadays many still believe in wearing the externals like vibhuti [ashes] on the forehead, rudraksha malas, wearing the dhoties in a particular way, visiting temples regularly, etc. and they are all fully secularly engaged and I feel that many of them have nothing to do with God for the rest of the day. There are others who daily read some eulogistic poems called stotras in their mother tongue for half an hour or maximum one hour after taking bath and their contact with God ceases with that.

In spite of all these facts, there are still a number of individuals who are living as a brahmachari or householder either doing bhajan and kirtan either alone or in groups or engaged in meditation through japa and other means in order to reach their final destination. I have seen many with high academic qualifications dedicated to the realisation of the Lord and doing severe sadhana at home without doing any business or service in any office or company, etc.

Yes, a majority of the people do not believe in any Supreme Being like God, etc. and believe in enjoying this life of mixed joys and sorrows. As I have described in another article in the website, there being only one Ultimate Reality, something like a living and loving energy and this entire life in this world is only a dream drama enacted by the only one director who may be called God, this entire life of all the people is a mega delusion which does not exist in reality. As the entire world and each individual is only a thought of God [imagination], just like the people in our own dreams, a permanent withdrawal of any thought by the grand thinker [God or Atman or Self], demolishes the individual connected with the thought and we may call it as moksha. As already I have quoted scriptural texts in another article, there has never been any creation or a dissolution, no bondage or a liberated soul, etc. The entire thing is part of a dream where all the roles are taken by the one cosmic dreamer.

Caste system

As I have already told in this article, the division of castes into Brahmins, Kshatriyas [warrior class], etc. were only a matter of necessity for the protection of the society. When the ancient people found separate groups of society in a forest there would be warfare, use of magic to harm others, the need for tilling the land for sowing wheat, paddy, etc. and to sell them for daily requirements of filling up the stomach. Hence separate groups for looking after each one of these affairs throughout the year were needed. The one who can do

counter magic through mantras and do research and rituals for improving the life of the society by invocation of the Lords through rituals, through yagas, doing research into how to get rid of and liberated from the sorrows and sufferings of life till they reach the ultimate reality were called the Brahmins. The Gayatri mantra and all our invocations to the various Gods were not for protection of a single individual but for protection of one and all. The Gayatri mantra ends in a plural by invoking the Supreme Being to bestow a righteous mind to enable all of us to reach their destination. Another invocation prays, “Sarve bhavantu sukhinah sarve santu niramayah –[may all remain happy and may all remain bereft of any ailment or disease”]. In a factory we have several departments primarily the production section, the disposal section, for research and development, etc. No one can say that one department is superior to another. Each one has a vital role to play in order to ensure a good profit from the organisation. In the same way, a Kshatriya, i.e. a warrior to defend the society was in no way inferior to a Brahmin. If any individual considered himself to be superior to others it is only an individuals fault and not that of the entire group.

Existence of God – sceptical attitude

Many of the modern people both in India and abroad have begun not to believe in the existence of God. In the pride of youth one is tempted to think that he is naturally bright and intelligent by birth having passed management post graduation from some foreign universities, etc. and as such they find no necessity for a God at all. It is only as he grows that he comes across unexpected obstacles which do not allow him to carry out his plan and problems arise in all the fronts including home, office, etc. which he is unable to surmount with all his knowledge and intelligence. I had known a young and brilliant general manager in a big concern who used to work very hard and expected to become the vice president of the concern soon enough. But one day he collapsed in his chair and died suddenly. If he was responsible for all happenings pertaining to him and was capable of managing all such missions, how did these things happen? I have also seen cases where people devoutly prayed to the Supreme Being so that dangerous situations were averted and began to prosper very well in their lives. This is all because of people expected to come face to face to a God external to himself who would be at his beck and call. For a minute, why don't you contemplate on the awareness in aspects of nature as also all worldly objects as also as to wherefrom the energy in his and others' bodies which enables you to see, to hear, to talk, to walk, etc. come from. We also never tried to find out where that energy has gone on death as according to the principles of thermodynamics, energy cannot be destroyed. In other words, you try to meditate on “Who you are?” and “Wherefrom the energy called you came into your body and whereto it has disappeared?” and then we will be able to find out that we are not individuals but the mere thoughts of the Ultimate Reality called Brahman or God or as Rama, Krishna, etc. and all the actions presumed to be done by the individual emanate only from that one real source. When once we find this, we will know that God is not

separate from us or the world and the so called individuality resulting in mutual competition, enmity, etc. is only a delusion. Ultimately there is only one reality and we all suffer because we wrongly presume the mega delusion of a body dividing us into individuals, just like the water bottles dipped into the river as a reality. The question arises as to what one should do to get rid of the delusion and to discover the reality. Initially, one should go to the company of knowledgeable mahatmas who live the true life of renunciates without greed for money, etc. under any excuse. Then, finally one is inspired to think of getting a Guru who can guide him in this path individually. Then by doing the sadhana prescribed by the Guru one who be enabled to reach his wanted destination.

****Hari Om ****

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