

Indian Scriptures: The Disseminator of Human Values and the Idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

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Abstract: Modern times are the times of uncertainty, corruption, wars and decline in moral values. In absence of the moral values the ultimate chaos has surrounded every humanbeing, making it difficult to live in peace and harmony. Religious scriptures come as saviors of mankind during such times of moral deprivation. These sacred books are the indispensable sources of guidance and values for each and every person. They are fundamental in shaping the human mind, behavior and attitude. The ancient Indian scriptures such as Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas are the storehouse of knowledge and beliefs that guide the humanity even today. They teach us values applicable to all human beings. For the layman who cannot understand the profound philosophy enshrined in the Vedas and Puranas, the revered sages like Valmiki and Maharishi Ved Vyasa wrote the twin epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata encompassing the same philosophy in an easy manner. This paper hence, is an attempt to highlight the importance of the ancient Indian scriptures that are the store house of the eternal moral values. The reading of these scriptures helps in the regeneration of the fast declining moral values in the modern man. As the modern man acquires the knowledge of these declining moral values, he emerges as a morally enlightened human being, who is dedicated to service of humanity. He treats everyone existing on this earth as the member of one large family of humanity, believing in as well as propagating the idea of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. “the whole earth is a family”.

Key terms: Modern man, Chaos, Scriptures, Values, Knowledge, humanity.

Introduction:

The modern world has become a very challenging and complex place where the individuals are engulfed with the mounting problems of corruption, exploitation, economic insecurities, wars, violence and environmental degradation. All these problems push an individual to the never-ending amiss, frustration, depression, void and alienation. A frustrated individual takes violence as his weapon to avenge himself against the corrupt world. But by resorting to violence, he doesn't end either violence or corruption. Rather he contributes more to death, destruction, and emptiness. Muktibodh says,

The void is very durable, it is fertile. Everywhere it breeds saws, daggers, sickles, breeds carnivorous teeth. That is why, wherever you look, there is dancing, jubilation, death is now giving birth to brand new children. (Muktibodh, 2004)

The challenges, hence, are devastating and it requires a collective effort from individuals, communities and institutions to build a world that is more peaceful, just and equitable. Promoting human values can help individuals and societies to work together to create a more harmonious world. Enumerating the immeasurable power and significance of the ethics and values, Gandhi (2002) stated that they are the “driving forces behind everything we do” and help us in achieving our goals. Various national and international problems may be solved through the practical application of human values in society. The significance of human values is reiterated time and again in local and global debates, assemblies, conferences and research works. The human values such as truth, love, peace, respect, kindness, forgiveness and benevolence et cetera must be strictly determined and must not be treated as mere obligations.

Human values:

Human values are the principles, standards, qualities and beliefs that are considered important for living a good and meaningful life by the human beings. Values are “the guiding principles that help us make decisions, set priorities, and choose the course of action that is right for us” (Winfrey, 2017). These principles play a crucial role in guiding the humans in their behavior

and shaping the society's culture and identity. These values provide a moral framework for ethical decision making and help individuals and communities to live together in harmony. "Values are like the compass that helps us navigate through lives, challenges and opportunities. They guide us towards the right direction and help us stay true to our purpose" (Maxwell, 2007). It is important to cultivate these values from the very beginning of one's life and it starts with the family itself. It is believed that changing an unpleasant behavior is difficult than trying to develop a new behavior. So, the parents should earnestly try to nurture good values in their children from an early age by portraying good behavior themselves. In addition to the family the educational institutions are also instrumental in imparting value education to the individuals.

Value education:

Parents and teachers play a crucial role in imparting values education to the children. The word education has its origin in the Latin word 'Educare'. It has two aspects, the worldly and the spiritual. The worldly education focuses merely on the knowledge of the physical world where as the spiritual education highlights the inherent divinity of man. Although, both the worldly as well as the spiritual education are equally important to lead a meaningful life, yet only worldly education receives prominence in the modern education system. Such education is the major cause of the downfall of man as it serves only two purposes i.e. artha (wealth) and swartha (selfishness). Inner peace, satisfaction, love, affection, magnanimity are linked only to spiritual education that is these days not given such prominence. This is a great matter of concern. True education is an amalgamation of both worldly and spiritual aspects. Just as both hands are required to make a loud clap, two wings are required by a bird to fly high in the sky, so also the two types of education is essential to lead a meaningful life. The worldly education relates to mind, the spiritual education relates to heart. The worldly education relates to the livelihood, the spiritual education relates to the life as a whole. The worldly education relates to information, the spiritual education relates to transformation. Both are the prerequisites for a person to transform into a balanced personality.

India: the ancient abode of human values:

The Indian subcontinent is home to one of the world's oldest and richest traditions of philosophical and religious thoughts. These thoughts are encapsulated in several scriptures and literary works that have played an important role in shaping the human values in India and beyond, inspiring countless individuals to strive for virtue, wisdom and compassion. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagvad Geeta and the religious books of Buddhism and Jainism have been the unprecedented sources of values in India from the times immemorial. "The Vedas are the fountainhead of Indian philosophy religion and culture and they continue to inspire and guide millions of people around the world with their profound wisdom and insights" (Kulshreshtha, 2017). As for the Ramayana, it is believed: "The Ramayana is a timeless Epic that speaks of the eternal struggle between good and evil, and offers valuable lessons about the importance of courage, selflessness, and devotion to duty" (Narayan, 1998). Whereas, "The Mahabharata is a timeless Epic that continuous to inspire and challenge readers with its universal themes of love, duty, sacrifice, and the human condition. It is a work of unparalleled richness and depth that offers a window into the ancient Indian civilization and it's cultural, philosophical, and spiritual traditions" (Penguin Classics, 2009). It emphasizes the importance of truth, justice, and the pursuit of dharma.

The education system of ancient times, with its knowledge, traditions and practices, guided and encouraged humanity in India and beyond. Our ancient education system has focused on the holistic development of the individual by taking care of both the inner and the outer self. It emphasized on the moral, spiritual, physical and intellectual aspects of life. Students were taught to appreciate the balance between human beings and nature. The students were taught to fulfill duties towards self, family and society, cherishing the values enshrined in the Vedas and Upanishads. The education system focused both on physical and metaphysical, worldly and spiritual education. It emphasized on both the healthy mind and healthy body.

Human values in Indian scriptures:

Satya (Truth):

"Satyam vada, Dharmamchara" (Speak the truth, follow righteousness) - Taittiriya Upanishad

“In Indian scriptures, satya is often equated with dharma, the eternal law that upholds and sustains the universe.” (Penguin Classics, 2009) One can promote the spiritual growth, build trust and work towards creating a more harmonious world by always speaking the truth and remaining committed to honesty and integrity. “Satya (truth) is the bedrock of Indian ethics and spirituality. It is the foundation of all human values and the guiding principle for ethical conduct, social harmony, and spiritual growth. The pursuit of truth is seen as the highest goal of human life, and the means to realize the ultimate reality”(Sharma, 2016). In Indian scriptures there is an example of a famous king who is known for his honesty and truthfulness. The King Harishchandra in Hindu mythology was known for his unwavering commitment to truthfulness even in the face of extreme adversity. When the famous sage Vishwamitra asked him to renounce his Kingdom and all his possessions, the king willingly gave up all his belongings. He refused to lie even when his family's well being was at stake. He remained steadfast in his commitment even after enduring many hardships. Eventually he was rewarded by the gods for his unwavering honesty and truthfulness.

Karama(Duty):

The Bhagvad Gita “is a timeless masterpiece of spiritual wisdom, offering profound insights into the nature of reality, the purpose of life, and the art of living in harmony with the universe”(Easwaran, 1985). It emphasizes the importance of duty, selflessness, and devotion to God. One of the most famous quotes from the Bhagavad Gita is:

Karmanyevadhikaraste Ma PhaleshuKadachana,

Ma Karma PhalaHeturBhurmateySangostvaAkarmani (2.47)

This quote from The Gita means that “You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward, nor should you long for inaction.” It emphasizes on the importance of detachment from the outcome of our actions. It is often cited as a guiding principle for the concept of karma yoga, or path of selfless action.

Dharam(Righteousness) :

Dharam is a complex and multifaceted concept in Indian scriptures. It encompasses both individual and social responsibilities as well as moral and ethical principles. It refers to duties

and responsibilities that are inherent in a person's life. Each individual is believed to have a specific Dharma based on the cast, creed, gender and other factors. By following one's Dharma and living in accordance with these principles one can promote spiritual growth, social harmony and liberation. This is seen as a way to promote social harmony and balance in the world. One of the most important examples in Indian scriptures of Dharma is the great war of Kurukshetra. It was fought between two sets of cousins grappled with the questions of Dharma and righteousness. The epic Mahabharata emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities even in the face of great adversity.

Ahimsa(non-violence):

“Ahimsāparamodharmah” - Mahabharata, Shanti Parva(262.5)

“Nonviolence is the highest duty and the highest teaching” (Sharma, 2018). Ahimsa is central to all the major religions and philosophies of India. By practicing non-violence one can cultivate the sense of compassion and respect for all living beings and strive towards creating a more peaceful and harmonious world. The founder of Jain religion lord Mahavir is considered one of the most important teachers of ahimsa. He practiced strict asceticism and believed that all living beings not just humans were deserving of compassion and respect. He taught that ahimsa was the key to spiritual liberation and that it was the highest form of virtue. His teachings emphasized on the importance of developing a deep understanding of the nature, of the self and the universe and living a life of simplicity, non violence and service to others.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism also taught the importance of ahimsa. He believed that violence only perpetuates suffering and that the only way to end suffering is through non-violence and compassion. He taught his followers to practice non-violence not just in their actions but also in their thoughts and words.

Tyaga (Renunciation):

Renunciation is an important concept that refers to the act of relinquishing attachment to the material desires and worldly pleasures in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita advises Arjun to renounce the fruits of his action and focus on performing his

duties without any attachment to the results. "O Arjuna, relinquishing all attachment to the results of one's activities, ever satisfied and independent, one can attain the supreme perfection of renunciation." (Easwaran, 2007)

Mahatma Buddha is also one of the most important examples of renunciation in Indian scriptures as he left his royal palace, wealth and family to seek the truth of life and attain enlightenment. Urmila the wife of Lakshmana in Ramayana is also a significant example of renunciation because when her husband insisted on to accompany lord Rama into exile she choose to stay behind and fullfill her duties as a wife and daughter in law even though it meant being separated from her husband for fourteen years. Renunciation is a testament to the values of selflessness, sacrifice and devotion that are upheld in Indian traditions.

Samanta (Equality):

Equality is an important value enshrined in our Indian scriptures. Women were given equal importance as was given to the men. They were not relegated to inferior positions rather they were treated more reverentially. They were treated as the incarnations of the goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati and Shakti. We also find in Indian Scriptures the famous Hindu deity who is depicted as half male and half female representing the inseparable union of the masculine and the feminine aspects of the universe. Ardhnarishwar is shown with a serene and peaceful expression embodying the idea of inner peace and balance unifying the masculine and feminine qualities in one body. We find many examples of the women warriors, women scholars in our Indian scriptures. Sulbha in Ramayana is a very good example of the learned woman. Urmila in Ramayan too is a very good scholar. There are mentions of various women scholars in Vedas and Puranas such as Sulbha in the king Janaka' court was also very good scholar.

Daya (Compassion):

Daya or compassion is an essential value in Indian scriptures. By cultivating compassion towards all living beings one can promote empathy, kindness and ultimately walk towards alleviating suffering in the world. In Jainism compassion is not limited to humans but it extends to all living beings including animals and insects. Jains believe in ahimsa or nonviolence towards all living beings and strive to avoid causing harm to even the smallest

creatures. They also believe in feeding and taking care of animals particularly during times of famine or hardships. In Buddhism also compassion towards all living being is essential for attaining anenlightenment. According to a Buddhist legendGautamBudhaapproached a man who was angry and abusive towards him with kindness and compassion. He saw the man's suffering and responded with empathy which eventually led the man to renounce his hostile behavior and become a follower of the Buddha.

Shanti (Innerpeace):

“Yato Dharma Tato Jaya, Yato Jaya Tato Shantihi, YatoShantihi Tato Sukham.” – Mahabharata. Shanti (peace) is an important value in Indian scriptures. Inner peace and peaceful coexistence are seen as essential for spiritual growth and social harmony. in Hinduism it refers to the state of being free from mental agitation and disturbance. The inner peace is achieved through various practices such as yoga, meditation, self-reflection which help the mind to become still and cultivate a sense of tranquility. The Vedas, the oldest scriptures in Hinduism, mention Shanti as a divine quality associated with the gods. It is believed that through rituals and offerings humans can invoke the blessings of gods and bring out peace and prosperity in their lives.

PryavaranChetna (Environmental Consciousness):

Environmental consciousness, or “PrakritiChetna” is an integral part of Indian scriptures. The Indian scriptures emphasize the importance of preserving the environment and living in harmony with nature. All the natural elements earth, air, water, fire, trees, sun etc are worshipped in Indian culture and scriptures. “Vrikshaevakutumbakam” - This shloka means “The tree is like a family.” It suggests that trees are not just objects, but living beings. This shloka encourages us to view trees and plants as important members of the natural world and to treat them with respect.

Atharva Veda: The Atharva Veda is one of the oldest Hindu texts, and it contains many hymns and mantras that express reverence for nature and the environment. It stresses the importance of maintaining ecological balance and protecting the environment. The Bhagavad Gita teaches the concept of “Sankhya Yoga,” which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment. It teaches that all living beings are part of a larger

ecosystem, and it is our duty to preserve and protect it. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali teach the concept of “Ahimsa,” which means non-violence towards all living beings. The Indian scriptures, thus, include the idea of “VasudhaivaKutumbakam” living in harmony with nature as well as humans and treating “the whole earth as one large family”.

Conclusion

The sacred books of all the religions contain the moral values for humans to imbibe into their behavior. Moral values are the values that let an individual decide between right and wrong. In this way moral values are the human ethics that distinguish between good and bad, thus, helping the humans to tread on the righteous path. “Our values are the guiding lights in our lives. They illuminate the way we go, and show us what's important”(Sinek, 2011). Every community has its shared social and moral values and certain standards that they all identify with. Indian scriptures contain a wealth of spiritual, philosophical, and ethical teachings, that can help us lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. We learn the values like satya, dharm, ahimsa, karam, self-realisation, detachment and so on through the scriptures. Thus, Indian scriptures can teach us valuable lessons about living a life of integrity, compassion, and spiritual awareness. They offer a blueprint for leading the meaningful life based on timeless values that are helpful to people of all the cultures and backgrounds

SadayamHridayarnYasyaBhasithamSathyaBhushitham

KayahParahitheYasyaKalisthasyaKarothishim

What can the evil effects of Kali Age do to a man whose heart is filled with compassion, whose every utterance is truth and whose body is dedicated for the service of others. To conclude, values are the saviors of humanity on this earth and teach us to become morally good humans who treat the whole world as one family discarding all the evils surrounding them.

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