

THE CONCEPT OF PEACE AND HARMONY IN THE SCRIPTURES OF HINDU RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY THROUGH THE AGES IN INDIA

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Abstract :

Indian culture is a treasure house of different philosophical & religious sects. Following different faiths, the Indians have been living together with peace and harmony for around three thousand years. Though there were philosophical dissensions & religious conflicts, these seldom escalated into a large scale pogroms or massacres of innocent lives. The paper is a modest endeavour to highlight those foundations, which have always established peace and harmony among various philosophical and religious sects.

Key Words : Peace, harmony, Vedas, religion and philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

It is often told that there should be religious tolerance in the world. The word 'tolerance' becomes a misnomer, when it is used in the context of Indian culture. Tolerance implies a certain degree of condescension and refraining from doing something worse. Tolerance brings harmony, but only for a short span of time. In fact, it may jeopardize peace and harmony in the long run. Indian culture advocates acceptance rather than tolerance for attaining lasting peace and harmony in the society. This paper highlights the instances of acceptance and synthesis among various philosophical and religious sects in India, which brought enduring peace and harmony.

The synthesis and acceptance is seen in the Vedic culture. The historians say that the rituals in the Atharvaveda show that they were in vogue among the Dravidians. But, the Āryans adopted them in their culture and included the Atharvaveda among the four-fold Vedas. It is also claimed that the depiction of Śiva reveals that he was not among the deities of Āryans initially. But, he became the integral part of Āryan religion at a later stage. Starting from the Vedas, we find that the Ṛgvedic religion, which begins with pluralism, finally culminates into monism. In the first *maṇḍala* itself, the Vedic seer declares that the ultimate reality is one but the sages call it by various namesⁱ. In the tenth *maṇḍala* also, the cosmic person is called as the cause of the universe in Puruṣasūktaⁱⁱ. In the Upaniṣads, the journey from pluralism to monism becomes absolutely explicit. In the Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad, the entire world and inner self is proclaimed as Brahman, the Ultimate realityⁱⁱⁱ. Muṇḍakopaniṣad says at one place that the one; who attains the Supreme knowledge; becomes unified with the Supreme reality by abandoning one's name and form just as the rivers mingle into the ocean by abandoning their names and forms^{iv}. All of these ideas give a strong message to see non-difference among differences.

In the period of epics and Purāṇas, the same kind of harmony among different religious sects is observed. The harmony between Vaiṣṇavism & Śaivism is worth mentioning here. Though Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are the prime deities of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, but these incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu have shown utmost reverence to Lord Śiva. In Purāṇic culture the concept of the trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva *per se* is the instance of synthesis of religions. Skandapurāṇa says at one place that Viṣṇu and Śiva are equal and there is no difference between them at all^v. Nārada purāṇa says that one, who discriminates between Viṣṇu and Śiva, even though one is a Brāhmin, goes to sinister hell^{vi}. If our Purāṇas propound the unity of Viṣṇu and Śiva, why should a Śaiva have problem with a Vaiṣṇava? The example of Kolottunga first (1070 AD -1120 AD) is exceptional. He was a Śaivaking of *cola* dianasty, who persecuted Rāmānujācārya^{vii}, the great Vaiṣṇavascholar.

Since religion and philosophy are inseparably intertwined with each other in India, every religious sect has a strong philosophical foundation. Different religious sects in India are made vibrant by their respective philosophies. To understand harmony among religious sects in India, we must observe the roots of harmony among philosophical schools in India. The various schools of Indian philosophy are divided in two main groups – orthodox system and heterodox system. Orthodox system believes in the authority of the Vedas. This group is comprised of six schools of Indian philosophy, namely, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. On the other hand, the heterodox system denies the authority of the Vedas. There are three main sects in this group, namely Buddhist, Jain & Cārvāka.

The syntheses of PūrvaMīmāṃsā & UttaraMīmāṃsā, Mahāyāna Buddhism & Sanātānism, Vaiṣṇavism & Śaivism, Vajrayāna Buddhism & Śāktism etc. are a few examples to understand how various philosophies and religions lived together in harmony.

Among these schools of Indian philosophy, we find harmony of all kinds: intra-system harmony, intra-school harmony and inter-system harmony. The prime ground of intra-system harmony in orthodox system is the Vedas only. Since all schools of orthodox system have emanated from the Vedas only, their differences are merely at surface-level. The synthesis of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā & Uttara Mīmāṃsā is aptly done by Śāṃkara and other Vedāntins. To them, *karma* and *bhakti* are not contradictory to *jñāna*. Conceiving them as complimentary to *jñāna*, they assimilated *karma* and *bhakti* in their system as the stepping-stone to *jñāna-mārga*.

The various branches of the Vedānta philosophy show intra-school harmony because all of them are based on the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* and *Brahmasūtra* (commonly known as *prasthānatrayī*). Gauḍapāda, a great Advaita scholar of seventh century says at one place that non-dualism is the absolute reality and dualism, which is the phenomenal reality, is its kind. Thus, dualism is not absolutely contradictory to non-dualism^{viii}. Later on, Śāṃkara developed the philosophy of Gauḍapādamutatis *mutandis* and he propounded the concept of three layers of reality viz. absolute reality (*pāramārthikasattā*), phenomenal reality (*vyāvahārikasattā*) and illusory reality (*prātibhāsikasattā*) and assimilated the dualist ideas also in his philosophy. This is an important instance of synthesis of different philosophical ideas.

Now, a few examples of inter-system harmony can also be observed between Mahāyāna Buddhism & Sanātānism. In the early Buddhism, Sanskrit was not a cherished language

because of its association with Sanātānism. But, The Mahāyāna Buddhists adopted Sanskrit as well along with Pali language. This led to the genesis of a new language called Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit. The Mahāyāna Buddhists infused the ideas of love and devotion in their system from Sanātānism. They brought the concept of theism in their school and consecrated Buddha as God, though God was completely denied in the ancient Buddhism. The Sanātāna system recognized Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu in lieu. Following Sanātānism, the Mahāyāna school, too, adopted the doctrine of incarnation (*avatāravāda*). These are the examples of synthesis and acceptance of ideas among two systems which are generally considered to be diametrically opposed to each other. In the same way, the conducts of Vajrayāna Buddhism are influenced mainly by Śāktism.

Let us see one more example from Sanātānism and Jainism. Most of the philosophical schools conceive that God is immanent in the world and transcendent as well. Jainism propounds the presence of microorganisms like *prthivīkāyika*, *jalakāyika*, *agnikāyika* and *vāyukāyika* everywhere. But, the end result is the same. All of these observe non-violence and keep a compassionate view towards every object in the world – sentient or insentient. In other words, their ontologies may be different, but all of them culminate into the same ethical ideology.

Some other instances of synthesis and acceptance in Indian philosophy can also be observed. The four noble truths (*āryasatya*) propounded in the Buddhist philosophy are mentioned in Nyāya and Sāṃkhya also by different names viz. *heya*, *heyahetu*, *hāna* and *hānopāya*.^{ix} One can see the common ground among these rival philosophies. One of the best examples of synthesis is that most of the schools of Indian philosophy have adopted the practice-aspect of Yoga philosophy. Most of the scholars, though having differences on several issues, have adopted the debate technique and Logic of Nyāya philosophy.

It is pertinent to discuss five kinds of religious ideologies in the context of India. These are indifferentism, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and universalism.

Indifferentism: Indifferentism is the view that there is no difference among religions and that they are all more or less the same^x. Not just illiterate people, but even the educated persons too give such sweeping remarks that all religions are the same. But, on account of being a product of ignorance, indifferentism cannot bring lasting peace and harmony.

Exclusivism: Exclusivism is the view that one's own religion alone is true and all the other religions are false. According to this view, there can be only one true revelation and only one true way of salvation^{xi}. Exclusivism has never been the part of Indian tradition. But, nowadays, it is a real menace to the society, which must be discouraged.

Inclusivism: Inclusivism also holds that one's own religion alone is true, but it does not hold that other religions are false, for they are included in one's own religion. Revelation in one's own religion is full, perfect and final, whereas revelation in other religions is partial, imperfect or preliminary. Other religions are only preparation to understand and accept one's own religion^{xii}. This view is very much there in Indian philosophy and tradition. Śāṅkara clearly says in his commentary on Brahmasūtra – "The philosophies like Sāṃkhya are accepted by gentries and is expected to lead to realisation. As these philosophies are propounded by

omniscient seers and their arguments are quite strong, people have faith in them. Therefore, we are trying to prove their futility.”^{xiii} This statement of Śamkara reflects the philosophy of inclusivism. At one place, Bhāsarvajña, the great Nyāya scholar, says that the Jainas etc. have taken the extra mundane ideas from the Veda itself and they are fooling people^{xiv}. Such idea is nothing but inclusivism only. But, it is a chauvinistic ideology, which has limited benefits. We need to broaden our bosom and respect other religions too.

Pluralism: Pluralism is a well-appreciated religious ideology developed mainly in the twentieth century. It holds that all religions are true, revelations are many and there are several paths to salvation. Pluralism conceives that truth has ultimately more than one valid constructions and human thinking can approach those constructions in quite different ways^{xv}. Pluralism is a way of establishing and understanding harmony among religions without ignoring the uniqueness of each. In the context of India, the Vedas subscribe to pluralism in the initial phase, where different deities are worshiped by different seers. The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* in Jainism explicitly advocates the pluralistic approach in every aspect of life. It simply implies that all religions are relatively true. But, the limitation of pluralism is that it recognises the differences among religions primarily. The benefits of pluralism can only be realised, when it culminates into universalism.

Universalism : The perspective of universalism is to seek common grounds among religions. If we meticulously observe Indian culture, universalism is the ideological message echoing in every aspect of it. Swami Vivekanand, the great exponent of Vedānta, has often quoted the verse from Śivamahimnastotra of Puṣpadanta in support of Universalist approach of Indian culture. It says – “Different paths to realization are enjoined by the three Vedās, by Sāmkhya, Yoga, Pāśupata doctrine and VaiṣṇavaŚāstras. People follow different paths, straight or meandering, according to their temperament, depending on which they consider best or most appropriate and reach You alone just as rivers enter the ocean.”^{xvi} Similar ideas have been expressed by MadhusūdanaSarasvatī in his Prasthānabheda. He says that the differences among philosophical sects are mere surficial and created by the non-comprehension of the actual import of the seers. Since the seers were omniscient, all paths to realisation propounded by them are genuine and all of them lead to the Supreme Reality^{xvii}. This is the essence of universalism among different philosophical & religious sects.

In the modern era, there are four approaches to the problem of peace and harmony viz. political, social, theological and mystical. In the Indian context, these four approaches should be adopted simultaneously to tackle the problem of peace and harmony in India. These are as follows:

Political Approach: It is the approach of the government in terms of its policies towards religion^{xviii}. This is of paramount importance as all the other approaches might become ineffective without it. The secularism as adopted by the government and the different political groups in India has completely failed and is questionable. We must adopt secularism in true sense and frame such policies, which might promote peace and harmony among religions.

Social Approach: The policies adopted by the government alone would not suffice. Different social and religious groups should come together to strengthen the inter-religious bond in the society. There should be constant interaction and dialogue among different religious groups and the philosophy of universalism should be promoted. This is meant by social approach.

Theological Approach: Theological approach means reinterpreting or rectifying scriptures in favour of harmony of religions. In our country, *śrutis*, are kept at a very high pedestal and they cannot be changed. But, they must be reinterpreted in such a way, which promotes harmony among different philosophical and religious sects. In case of *smṛtis*, both reinterpretation and rectification are possible and should be done.

Mystical Approach: This approach is based on the principle that, apart from the revealed knowledge gained from the scriptures, it is possible to have direct experience of the Ultimate Reality known as mystical knowledge. Every religion has a rich mystical tradition built through many centuries. Though there might be variations regarding the content of experience all mystics agree that direct experience of the Supreme Reality is possible.^{xix} This very agreement can serve as the basis for establishing harmony among religions. This approach must be inculcated in the society. The combination of all of these approaches would indeed bring lasting peace and harmony among religions.

Hinduism is an umbrella under which different religious sects have flourished. It is often termed as 'way of life' because it is not definable. But, there are common grounds through which Hinduism can be understood. There are four foundation pillars on which Hinduism is constructed. These are: (1) action and rebirth (*karma & punarjanma*), (2) metempsychosis (*saṃsāra*), (3) knowledge (*jñāna*) and (4) bondage and liberation (*bandhana & mukti*).^{xx} Considering these pillars as the foundations of Hinduism, even Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism are subsumed under Hinduism. If people are made aware of these universal grounds among these religions, peace and harmony could be obtained. In fact, the Indian culture is like a watermelon, where the differences among philosophical and religious sects are at the surface. But, inside the water-melon, the same ambrosia of peace and harmony is interspersed and uniting the different sects.

References

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ekam sad viprabahudhāvadantyagniṃyamaṃmātariśvānamāhuḥ //" – Ṛgveda; 1.164.46
ii Ṛgveda; 10.90
- iii "sarvaṃhyetadbrahmāyamātmā brahma so'yamātmācatuṣpāt/" – Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad; 2.
- iv "yathānadyaḥsyandamānāḥsamudre'stamgacchantināmarūpevihāya /
tathāvidvānnāmarūpādvimuktaḥparātparampuruṣamupaitidivyaḥ //" – Muṇḍakopaniṣad;
3.2.8
- v "yathāśivastathāviṣṇuryathāviṣṇustathāśivaḥ /
antaramśivaviṣṇoścamanāgapinavidyate //" – Skandapurāṇa; 1.8.20
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- vii Prācīna Bhārata Kāltihāsa Tathā Saṃskṛtiby K. C. Srivastava, Allahabad, 1999; p. 827.
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teṣāmbhayathādvaitam tenāyam navirudhyate //" – Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad kārikā; 3.8
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- x Harmony of Religions by Swami Bhajanananda; Ramakrishna Mission Kolkata, 2008, p. 4.
- xi Ibid; p.13.
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xv Harmony of Religions by Swami Bhajanananda, Ramakrishna Mission Kolkata, 2008, p.16.
xvi "trayīsāṅkhyāṁ yogaḥ paśu patimataṁ vaiṣṇavamiti
prabhinneprasthāne paramidamadaḥ pathyamitica /
rucīnāṁ vaicitryādṛjukuṭilanānāpathajuṣāṁ
nṛṇāmekogamyastvamasipayasāmarṇavaiva //" – Śivamahimnastotra; 7.
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xix Ibid; p.8.
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