

Hinduism – By Swami Nirbhayananda Saraswathi

Shruthi & Smruthi

A scientific study of Hinduism reveals 2 dimensions it - this is so with every highly developed world religion - namely religion as a socio-political discipline and religion as a path to the experience of God or any value equivalent is it. The first consists of the do's and don'ts of religion and the rules and regulations about food, dress, marriage and other social disciplines besides myths, legends and cosmogonical theories. These constitute the socio-political constituents of a religion historically conditioned and conventionally accepted but not the science of religion, the inner core it-self. The science of religion constituted of paths such as Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Gnana Yoga, Karma Yoga as far as Hinduism is concerned, is the real spiritual part, with its emphasis on personal morality, worship and adoration and the disciplines designed to ensure the spiritual growth of man. These constitute the essential and the invariable and the universal core of religion while the former form the variable non-essential, which is also relevant but only when it does not choke the spirit of the latter.

Indian tradition calls the former as smritis and the latter as Shruthi constituents of a religion and considers Shruthi as eternal and universal in validity and Smruthi as local and parochial and temporary in application. Accordingly, Shruthi represents Sanatana Dharma. Eternal religion which remains while Smruthi represents Yuga dharma, the religion for a particular age which changes. Therefore, India considers that the yuga dharma constituent of a religion is not only not applicable for all people universally but irrelevant to its own people of a later age due to changes in conditions of life of the people concerned. So, the Indian tradition provides for appropriate changes in smritis yuga dharma to make them relevant for the changed social circumstances which otherwise render them obsolete and often harmful.

The Shruthi part in Hinduism is the Vedas, the essence of which are major Upanishads on which the great Shankaracharya has commented in a masterly fashion which is a spiritual science consisting of spiritual truths impersonal and therefore universal, verified and ever open for re-verification that have been leading men irrespective of cast or creed or race towards the creation of a dynamic and healthy climate of active toleration and harmony outwardly and

powerful spiritual dynamo that can be a source of inspiration for an intrepid & indefatigable spiritual journey through spiritual disciplines & strict regulations.

How the Shruthi's or the Veda's came into existence forms an interesting part of the religious history of man for it stands out as a pre-cursor for the development of science in modern times.

Every product of mind, be it philosophy or science is always a fruit of deep introspection carried on with passion for long durations by sensitive and piercing minds individually or collectively.

A pre-supposition for such a process can come only when the mind is engripped and stirred by some continuously haunting phenomena, enigmatic though, does not fail to arrest the attention due to it's super natural dimensions and repetitions.

The phenomena that churned the sensitive minds of India whom we call rishis or seers meaning who saw the laws of nature external and internal are.

1. The regular appearance and disappearance of sun in all his bewitching and colourful setting
2. The unnerving and deafening thunderbolt that sent tremors down the spine and the stupefying lightning
3. The devastating monsoon rains that virtually swept off normalcy of life
4. The swaying and imposing presence of omni present sky, the home and arena of all these wonders and riddles.

If the above puzzles for ever occupied the mind of an aryan in the beginning equally elusive and triggering were dream and death at his own level which though did not become an immediate subject of study later formed a launching point for flights of philosophy into limitless horizons.

The awe- inspiring nature of the above phenomena compelled the rishi (aryan) to ascribe them for some mysterious and powerful living beings as they were feats of super human dimensions and develop an attitude of respect born of fear in the beginning, ripening later into veneration assigning them all names such as Agni, Indra, Surya, Rudra etc around whom we have plenty of hymns composed by them constituting the Samhita part of the Vedas and also developing rituals and sacrifices of various types as means of pleasing them to be rewarded with everything they aspired for ranging from liberation from all mundane limitations up to the ridiculous through every type of sense pleasure in all its variety and intensity.

As the intimacy with these gods deepened they found out that they were not independent but different aspects of one supreme god resulting in ascribing to them the glory of the supreme god too. They declared **“Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadantih”**

This observation marks a revolution in the religious history of India and Swami Vivekananda calls it **“Magna Carta”** of religions, for India is here synthesizing all godly entities striking a unity among diversity also gaining an additional benefit of getting a powerful hint for what it proclaimed on a later day which is still more awe-some and still more far-reaching in its consequence that there is unity of all existence **“ Sarvam Khalvidam Bramha”** which is fully upheld today by Ervin Schrodinger, The father of quantum physics.

India reached a stage where it's sky reverberated with mantras or hymns and smoke of sacrificial fire (all over the land) forming a parallel canopy or firmament

A Separate section of society called Brahmanas and a separate section of the Vedas known by the same name were provided for the meticulous carrying out of these rituals which integrated humanity of India with divinity resulting in prosperity and Plenti fullness with timely rains, fertility of soil, progeny, health, longevity of life leading to the pleasure loving seeking more and more avenues for pleasure and the reflective and speculative exhausting themselves in the creation of innumerable variety of aesthetics, literature, art on the one hand and different aspects of science as the other making modern day thinkers like Ella wheeler Wilcox, an American poetess and journalist comment like.

“India, the land of the Vedas, the remarkable works contains not only religious ideas for a perfect life but also facts which science has proved true, electricity, radium electronics warship all are known to the seers who founded the Vedas”

But the cosy life did not continue for long. The sense bound life started becoming lack lustred and increasingly disappointing as the discerning and discriminative found it suffering from terrible limitations culminating in death.

As it is always observed, in human psychology man's aversion to sense joy started getting reflected in a sort of indifference towards sacrifices, source of sense joy, and worst even towards the Vedic gods whom the sacrifices were intended for. Now they wanted an alternative for all the three.

- The jading gross body had to be replaced by a better alternative as integral to and inseparable from their being which made them search into their own selves.
- They wanted to have higher version of sacrifice as they thought there could be one such. corresponding to subtler version of the body

On similar argument they anticipated a higher version of God also. To Sum up the triangle of

1. Gross body
2. Sacrifices
3. Vedic Gods of natural phenomena viz Indra, Agni etc

had to be replaced by more stable and rewarding combination in which they remarkably succeeded.

All this happened when they started ‘tackling death’ the most awful of all miseries and the greatest of threats to the joy and pleasures of life.

We see totally a new turn taking place in India giving rise to what we call as Vedanta – the essence of the Vedas – a bed rock upon which the whole system of thought, developed through later periods, rests. Here philosophy and religion merge into one. Instead of external nature & it’s gods being the centre of attention, man and his inner nature become the subject matter. They clearly come to conclusion that causes manipulate the effect as in the physical body becoming helpless at the departure of it’s subtle counterpart. So, search for the ultimate in man became the converging point of the whole thought ferment that engripped India at this time.

While analysing the death of a man they thought there has been a bright substance having the form of the body which remained even after this body fell. Later on, however we find a higher idea coming – that this bright body did not represent the ultimate because what so ever has form must be the result of combinations of particles and requires something else to move it and that something else was called Atman & it can’t have any form or shape.

Great discussions followed. Speculations were made. Various shades of philosophic enquiries came into existence.

They further concluded, if the ultimate in man did not have any form or shape it must be omni present. Time begins with mind space also is in the mind causation cannot stand without time. Without the idea of succession there can't be any idea of causation. Time, space & causation therefore are in the mind & as this atman being beyond subtle body, mind and formless, it must be beyond time, beyond space and beyond causation. It must be infinite.

Then comes the highest speculation of the rishis. The infinite cant be two, if the self be infinite there can be only one self & all the ideas of various selves or souls – you having one and I having another are not real. The real man therefore is one & infinite, the omnipresent spirit. And the apparent man is only a limitation of that real man.

Right from Vedanta to our mythologies proclaim that apparent man however great he may be, is a dim reflection of that real man who is beyond.

The real man was never bound; he appears to be bound. Every soul is infinite, therefore there is no question of birth or death.

The absence of the knowledge of his own true nature is responsible for man's being bound.

The self-image i.e. your concept about your-self can overpower the real you is what they found out which today is the central theme of the book "Man the unknown" by noble laureate Alexis carrel.

A cub that grew up in the company of sheep suffered from all the limitations of a sheep. But when it was tutored about it's true nature it asserted the lion in it and all sufferings vanished in a trice. This is exactly the case with man. "The old man must go for the glory to manifest itself" as bible puts it.

Evolution automatically suggests an involution. If amoeba evolved itself into Buddha, amoeba must be involved Buddha waiting for the right condition for the Buddha to come out. This right condition is the right internal condition. Creating the right internal condition or the right mind and right heart is all the scope of (spiritual science through) spiritual practices (temples, churches, books, yoga systems, etc.)

The right condition consists of the ripening of the present ego through spiritual practices of various types depending upon the natural propensities of the seeker resulting in the total annihilation of the same.

This is transcending one-self by one-self by expanding one's consciousness into the psyche of other beings to the elimination of little-self gradually becoming impersonal & universal.

This is how India aimed at producing an ethical man or moral man.

Innumerable methods were developed for the ripening & annihilation of 'Ego' all of which were included in one word '**Yoga**' which means literally integrating the finite with the infinite. They are 4 in number each developing one dimension in man to it is logical perfection.

Jnana yoga: develops analytical faculties aimed at knowing the true nature of one's self.

Bhakti yoga: develops, refines and directs the feelings towards a God head.

Raja yoga: develops will power through purified & concentrated minds

Karma yoga: Annihilation of personalised ego through self-less service

What becomes of a man who has reached this perfection?

He becomes the very divine being from whom he was seeking favours during the sacrificial period of the Vedas.

Swami Vivekananda puts it beautifully when he says

“The infinite power of the spirit brought to bear upon matter gives material development. If it is made to act upon thought it gives intellectuality; if it is made to act upon itself it makes man a God”.

He further continues “Teach your-self, teach everyone his true nature; come out of this hypnotism of weakness. Power will come, purity will come, glory will come, goodness will come everything that is excellent will come once the sleeping soul is roused to self-consciousness activity.

The phenomenon of man's realization of his innate abilities & infinite nature has all too far reaching implications & consequences at spirituo-cultural dimensions of a religion.

Now man, the microcosm, becomes the divine macrocosm & hence controlling internal nature is same as controlling external nature. Thus, men of controlled minds are known for super human feats that normally appear as miracles.

The altitude one has towards one's own self decides his concept of God as a great devotee Hanuman has said

Deha budhyatu dasosmi

Jeeva Budyatmadamshakah

Atma Budhyatmaevaham

Iti Me Nishchita Mathihi

As long as I am in body consciousness I am servant & you are master,

If I am at ego in its ripening state I am part & you are whole, if I am in self-consciousness you are me and I am you thus, necessitating sympathy towards religious multiplicity & concord among them. It further implies that all seekers stand on the circumference of a circle, while the God being at the centre & every religion being the radius where no radius is either small or big, which accounts for India's active toleration and acceptance of all religions.

The infinite Supreme brahman the formless & attribute less when voluntarily takes upon himself the limiting influence of time, space & causation – the combination of which we call Maya – comes to be called as Eshwar – the creator, sustainer and the dissolver in one – which aspects separately are represented by Hindu trinity Bramha, Vishnu & Shiva whom all other Gods of subjectively owe their allegiance to.

To sum up the essence of Hinduism can truly put in a few words as Swami Vivekananda exhorted that "Each soul is potentially divine the goal is to manifest this divinity by controlling nature external and nature internal. Do this either by selfless work, devotion, psychic control or by analysis of true nature into oneself and be free. This is the whole of religion. Temples, books, churches, mass are secondary details.

Om Tat Sat

Sri Ramakrishnarpana Matsu

Om Peace Peace Peace