

Chapter V. Basic Belief

For centuries, the Eternal Universal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*) had to meet determined opposition from Islam. Political subjection to Muslim dynasties added to the problems. The cry “*Allaho Akbar*” rose to the skies and challenged the very existence of Indian culture, which had been fostered for ages by seers. No other nation suffered as long and deep from such fear. But the eternally fresh and vital *dharma* of this land stood the test, and even today, the Eternal Religion is as potent and valid as ever. It is ready to meet any challenge from any new quarter. From the signs of the times, it is evident that this culture is today dominant and powerful; why, it is prepared even to march forward and expand its area of constructive influence. Expansion is the sign of “life”, isn’t it?

This day, the principles and practices laid down in Indian (*Bharathiya*) culture and the attitudes and feelings enshrined in it are not lying low within the boundaries of this subcontinent. Whether we like it or not, they cross over to other lands and establish themselves there. The main ideas, the essential outlooks penetrate the literature of those peoples and permeate their thought processes. In some lands, among some peoples, they have even won dominant roles, with no opposition. For, India (Bharath) is offering an invaluable body of spiritual wisdom as its contribution to the peace and prosperity of the world. This contribution is more elevating than that of any other country. It is more necessary, more basic, and more precious than what any other nation can give. This fact is becoming clearer to all mankind.

The ancients of this land were not averse to examining other problems, too. They tried, like other peoples, to unravel the mysteries of external nature. Even in this field, through the exercise of sharp intellect of these ancients, this amazing nation achieved results that are beyond the fondest dreams of people in other countries.

Never-changing supreme Reality

The supreme end of education, the highest purpose of instruction, is to make one aware of the “universal immanent Impersonal”. This truth is loudly proclaimed in the *Vedas*. The seers and sages of India courageously entered upon this adventure. The ever-changing aspects of nature, the appearance and disappearance of its working, may be a fine subject for study. But the ancients of India proclaimed that the science of the “transcendent Principle” that permeates the universe, of the unchanging Eternal, of the embodiment of everlasting, ever-full bliss (*ananda*), of the residence of unaffected undiminished peace, of the ultimate refuge for all time of the individual (*jivi*)—that science is the highest knowledge that one must gain.

The knowledge of the principles governing objective nature can at best provide one with food and clothing. It teaches ways and means of gaining them and leads to exploitation of the weak by the strong. If the people of India had bent their energies to discovering the secrets of the world, they could easily have acquired mastery.

But, very soon, the people of India (Bharath) recognized that this search was secondary and that the prime position should be assigned to the spiritual. They decided that pursuing the secrets of external nature was not the real sign of Indians. This resolution brought glory to this nation. Others cannot even approach the fringe of this problem. Like Prahlada of the legends, Indians have been able to survive ordeals of fire and escape unhurt from the torture of ages. Those who had no spiritual outlook or aspiration were not reckoned as Indians (*Bharathiyas*).

Many in foreign lands believed that Indians were more politically minded, an inference that was misleading.

They felt that only a small fraction of Indians were spiritually oriented. But India always insisted that a spiritually directed way of life was the first and foremost duty of every Indian. Whenever the chance offered itself, after discharging this duty, Indians felt that they should collect and confirm the spiritual potency that they had. This was exactly what happened in the past.

In those days, national integration meant the concentration and commingling of all the spiritual forces and urges that were scattered among seekers all over the land. In India, the word “nation” meant the grouping together of hearts that beat time to the same song and that responded by similar vibration to the same spiritual call. The basic truths that this faith expounded were as broad as the sky, as eternal as creation. Those truths were described in many subtle ways and commented upon very closely and deeply. But, as a result of the very breadth of the vision that discovered them and laid them down, it was inevitable that many faiths emanated on the basis of the beliefs they encouraged.

Unity in diversity

Diversities in attitudes and practices are natural and should be welcomed; there is no need for an ironclad, hard faith. There is no place for one over-all Faith. Rivalry among those following different paths cannot bring peace and prosperity to any country. Without the freedom to adopt faith, the world cannot progress.

India taught that a small group can never command the inexhaustible resources of the world, that for the effective functioning of the community it is necessary to divide the work of the community among sections of the people and allot the task of contributing its share of the common good to each section. This gave facilities for diversity and for mutuality. Diversities were approved for the sake of the practical application of spiritual powers and potentialities, so there is no need for factionalism and fights. The diversities are also only superficial; they are not really real. There is an entrancing sense of mystery that can explore these diversities and discover the key to visualize the ONE that underlies the many. This is what the ancient texts proclaim as the most precious revelation: The One alone exists; wise people describe it in manifold ways (*Ekam sath, vipraah bahudha vadanthi*).

Vedas: bedrock of universal spirituality

Therefore, it can be asserted that the faith of the Indians is the one faith that accepts and reveres all faiths. When we shelter factionalism and fanaticism in our hearts in relation to our own specific faith or the faith of others, we, as descendents of those fathers, bring disgrace on ourselves. Whether we are adhering to the classical *Vedantic* faiths or are adopting recent trends in *Vedantic* thought, we have to bear in mind certain basic universally accepted truths. All those who bear the name Hindu have to believe in them and shape their lives accordingly. May they have the will to do so.

1. Indians (*Bharathiyas*) do not insist that everyone has to be bound to one attitude, or that everyone must abide by only one interpretation or commentary to the exclusion of other possible explanations or points of view, or that the way of life with all its implications has to be the one approved by some one individual or group. The Indian culture lays down that it is a heinous sin to exercise force upon anyone in matters of the spirit.

2. The Eternal Universal Dharma or Religion is taught by the *Vedas*. The sacred body of teachings, referred to as *Vedic*, is coeval with creation, without ascertainable beginning or end. With it, all inquiry into the spirit and the ramifications of faith have to find fulfilment and close. If one studies and practises the *Vedas*, one cannot escape

this conclusion.

For all problems involving differences in spiritual attitudes and aspirations, we can get convincing solutions from the *Vedic* texts themselves. The viewpoints differ about what portions of the *Vedas* are authoritative for each; persons affiliated with one sect might regard some portions of the *Vedas* as holier and more sacrosanct than others. In spite of this, all are brothers and co-sharers of the teachings and lessons imparted by the *Vedas*. All that is elevating and beneficial for us today, all that is holy and sacred to us, and all that is pure and ennobling has been made available to us from and through these wondrous texts of old. As long as we hold to this latter belief and proclaim it aloud, what can little differences of opinion over matters of minor importance do to cause rifts? For this reason, we have to announce these lessons and principles so that they spread beyond all horizons.

3. The *Vedas* are concerned with and expound upon the Supreme Person (Iswara) who created this universe, who fosters it, in whom It merges in accordance with the process of time, and in whom this amazing universe is again manifest as His Form.

We might have diverse beliefs concerning the nature and characteristics of this Lord. One person might picture Him as having human nature and characteristics. Another might believe that He is the embodiment of nonhuman attributes, formless, Lord (Iswara). Every one of these can find declarations supporting their viewpoints in the *Vedas*. Although they hold diverse views, they all have faith in the Godhead. That is to say, they believe that there is undoubtedly One transcendent eternal Power, that all this has originated from It, and that all this has to merge in It again. This belief is the hallmark of an Indian (*Bharathiya*). One who has not acquired this belief is not entitled to the name Indian and doesn't deserve to be called a Hindu.

No gradation for divine names or forms

Of what nature, with what characteristics, is the Lord (Iswara) you teach about? This question is irrelevant to us. It is not so important. Let us not dispute the various points of view that divide people. It is enough for us if the Lord is accepted and emphasized. For even though one description and delineation might be better and clearer than another, no delineation and description can be "bad". One declaration would be "good"; the second, "better"; the third, "best". But in the stream of Indian spiritual adventure, no description or picturization can be pronounced "bad and unacceptable". That is why the Lord confers grace on all those who teach as sacred and valid any Name and any Form that can attract and inspire mankind. May this faith grow more and more, for the more it is acted upon, the more spiritual progress it brings. But the aspiration must be related to God (Iswara).

4. For spiritual exploration and discovery, there can be no qualification like wealth or disqualification like poverty. This truth has to be handed down to the children by Indian (*Bharathiya*) parents. Children have to grow up with this broad feeling.

5. Indians (*Bharathiyas*) do not accept the belief, held by people belonging to other countries, that the universe was manifested a few thousand years ago and that it will be destroyed finally and forever, at some future date. Indians will not accept the theory that the universe arose out of nothing. They believe that the universe or this objective creation is beginningless and endless. Further, according to the laws of evolution in time, it will recede from the gross into the subtle stage and, after being in that stage for some period, will again recede into the causal stage from which it emerged. From the One into which it merges, it will gradually manifest itself as Many, through the subtle and the gross stages of expression.