

Chapter XII. Values in Later Texts

Soon after the propagation of *Vedanta* through the *Upanishads* and other texts, the sages (*rishis*), steeped in austerities (*tapas*) and spiritual experience gained therefrom, composed the codes of law (*smrithis*), expatiating upon the codes of conduct for the people during the various stages of life as well as when they occupied various statuses in society. The codes of law, however, did not acquire the authority that the *Vedantic* texts had, for they dealt with rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations.

Ancient law codes and Atmic reality

Such codes of law can be found in sacred scriptures adored by followers of other religions. They consider such social codes and individual guidelines given by their prophets and seers as valuable and binding. We, too, revere them and should continue to revere them as regulations set up for the good of society and the progress of humanity. For we must admit that they were framed by outstanding sages and well-wishers of the people.

But, in the process of time, the codes of law suffered change by omissions, additions, and differences in emphasis. The sages allotted for each era (*yuga*) a particular code of law as authoritative, for too many codes of law with divergent counsel caused confusion and doubt. They said that those in the *Kritha* era have to consider one code of law as specially laid down for them, those in the *Thretha* era have to follow the dictates of another, those in the *Dwapara* era have to observe the path prescribed in a third, and those in the *Kali* era have to resort to a fourth.

When centuries roll over the land one after another, new problems arise and new situations and predicaments confront one, so the laws and limits of the past have to be altered here and there. Indeed, such adjustments are a part of the design. The people have to be shown the path to spiritual progress under the altered circumstances, so the code of law that suits the new era is declared as binding.

Nevertheless the following has to be borne in mind and carefully noted in memory by the readers. The *Atma-dharma* (divine *dharma*) enunciated in the *Vedanta* is eternal, unchangeable. It can never be watered down or “adjusted to the needs of the times”. The lasting teaching is: Faith in the *Atma* as the core, the reality, the goal is true for all time. The truths of *Atma-dharma* are based on the eternal foundations of the core of a person and nature (*prakriti*), which is the projection of the divine will. So, they are beyond the reach of change. They are as relevant and as valid today as they were thousands of years ago. Even when a thousand more years roll by, their relevance and validity cannot be affected in the least. *Vedanta* will stand firm, regardless of the past becoming the present and the present flowing on into the future.

However, the moral codes and ideals of good conduct, the spiritual disciplines that one can adopt to control the mind and senses and purify the intelligence have to suit the conditions of the people and the bonds they cultivate among themselves and other groups. With the changing face of social conditions, they also have to undergo adjustments and modifications. They could be appropriate and beneficial under certain circumstances of time and space, but they might be not so under other circumstances.

For example, food regulations that are prescribed during certain periods are withdrawn and new rules are laid down during other periods. Climatic conditions dictate the type of food needed. Traditional codes of law

(*smrithis*) recognize the need and allow changes in food habits, in order to maintain health.

The same attitude is also seen in other matters. For the same reasons, under modern conditions, it is desirable to have changes in the regulations and limits that govern society. Of course, the fundamental principles of *dharma* must remain unaffected. They can never be shaken or loosened.

Puranas, or lore of mythology

Now, about the *Puranas*. “The *Puranas* deal with historical incidents, of creation and evolution (*Puranam pranjali kshanam*).” The incidents are chosen and narrated to provide illustrations of basic philosophic truths. The *Puranas* were composed to expound the teachings of the *Vedas* and *Vedanta* to the common person through interesting mythological and legendary tales. The language of the *Vedas* is very ancient and contains many archaic elements of grammar and vocabulary. Even great scholars find it difficult to discover the age when the verses (*riks*) were formulated.

But the *Puranas* were composed in the language that was current and easily understood at the time. What we now know as Sanskrit is the language of the *Puranas*. Not only scholars but even ordinary folk could easily follow that language when the *Puranas* were written.

The *Puranas* have historical narratives of divine personages, great rulers, dynasties, and the fortunes of kingdoms and communities. Through them all can be seen shining examples of *dharma* and expositions of spiritual principles.

All the texts, scriptures, and holy books referred to are grouped under the one comprehensive name “Hindu Scriptures (*sastras*).” It is no wonder that the people who revered and composed such a vast and valuable literature of religion and philosophy over thousands of years were, in the course of time, divided and subdivided into sects and subsets, which owed preferential loyalty to special creeds and beliefs. Some of these had broad gaps between them.

We have no time now to elaborate on the fact that the differences between the sects are based on attitudes born out of the freedom of thought that was authoritatively allowed by the ancients. Nor is it necessary. What we have to grasp are: the truth accepted by all and the attitudes approved by all, that is to say, the principles that a person calling himself “Hindu” has to believe.

People are responsible for their fate

What exactly is the cause of creation? What is the nature of the original substance that creation effected, and how was it effected? These questions are important not only for Indians (*Bharathiyas*) but for all people prone to inquiry. There can be no effect without a cause; there can be no structure without a base.

Well. It can be asserted that all this visible cosmos has *Brahman* as the root cause, but what is *Brahman*? *Brahman* is eternal, pure, ever vigilant, omniscient, indivisible, formless; *Brahman* is the origin of this cosmos (*jagath*). *Brahman* is shaping, evolving, and fostering this cosmos.

Now, a few doubts might arise in people’s minds: Why is so much partiality evident in creation? Some are born healthy; others, unhealthy. Some lead prosperous carefree lives; others toil throughout their lives in dire poverty. Certainly, it can be argued, there are signs enough of the partiality that creation or the Creator reveals.

It has to be made clear that life thrives on death. Life is based on death: One living thing consumes another in order to live. The strong trample the weak. This tale of terror continues unceasingly. It is the very nature of this world. Seeing this, people conclude that, if the world was created by God, He should be cruelty itself. Such inference appears justified from the ordinary person's point of view.

But the pure stream of Indian spiritual culture (*Bharathiya Paramartha Vahini*) declares that this is not true at all! God is not the cause of either misery or joy, of good fortune or bad, it announces.

Then who brings about evil and good? We ourselves, is the answer. Rain falls equally on ploughed and unploughed land. Only the ploughed land derives benefit from it. The clouds are not to blame. The fault lies in the ignorant idler who lets the land lie fallow. The grace of God is ever at hand, it has no "more or less", no ups or downs. We draw upon it, more or less, and use it for our good.

The question might arise: Why are some born in happiness and some in misery? They have done neither good nor evil, to be treated so unequally. True, they have done nothing in this life; they are only just born. But they had done good or evil in previous lives. The consequence of what was done in the previous life has to be experienced in this life.

Now, we can arrive at two conclusions on which all sects of Hinduism are agreed. The Buddhists and the Jains also accept these two. Every one of us has the firm belief that life is eternal. It could not have originated from nothing. That is impossible. If it had come out of inert slime or mud, it would have been inert and inactive. All things put together will disintegrate. All that is bound by time will end in time. If life started only yesterday, it cannot last beyond tomorrow. If the tree has roots, the roots shall go dry and it cannot survive forever. Life must have existed ever since the Cosmos has been in existence. It does not require argument to understand this truth. Do we not see that all modern sciences tend to confirm more and more assuringly and clearly the revelations made in the texts and scriptures of India? This too has to be accepted some day.

Triple texts of highest spirituality

As authoritative texts of the basic beliefs of Indian culture in the spiritual field, the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutra*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* —the *Three Sources (Prasthanas)*— have to be reckoned. Many in India feel that only the doctrine of nondualism (*a-dvaita Vedanta*) is correct, but this attitude is not correct. The *Upanishads* are the very voice of God. The *Brahma Sutra* is the supreme embodiment of the principles and doctrine propounded by Vyasa; it is the most important of the texts that depict philosophic doctrines. It harmonizes the entire body of philosophic beliefs; though it is based on earlier texts and dissertations, there is no conflict between the earlier and later. In the aphorisms of the *Brahma Sutra*, each conclusion attains fulfilment and reconciliation. The *Bhagavad Gita* acts like a commentary provided by God, for *Vedanta*.

All sects of Hinduism that claim to be authentic and orthodox accept the *Three Sources* as their basic texts — whether they are dualists, qualified nondualists, or nondualists. Whoever desired to propagate a new interpretation or a new attitude or theory —Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwacharya, Vallabhacharya, or Chaithanya— had to propagate it through commentaries from that standpoint on only the *Three Sources*. Therefore, to assert that *Vedanta* can be used only with reference to the *Upanishads* and the doctrines that they teach would be a great mistake.

All conclusions drawn from the *Three Sources* are genuine and deserve the name *Vedanta*. Qualified nondualism as well as dualism have as much claim to be known as *Vedanta* as nondualism. This unity in diversity, this

harmony of difference, is the core of the current Indian (*Bharathiya*) thought.

There is milk in the body of the cow. The milk has ghee (clarified butter) in it, but the cow cannot derive any strength through it. The milk has to be taken out of the animal, it has to be boiled, and a little sour curd has to be poured into it to curdle it. After the milk is transformed into curds, it has to be churned, and the butter has to be separated and rolled. Afterward, the butter has to be melted and clarified to get the ghee. The ghee thus prepared can be fed to the cow, and then it would be rendered stronger.

So too, consider: God is omnipresent, but He isn't amenable to people unless they do spiritual practice (*sadhana*).

Dualism and nondualist wisdom

Oil is in the sesame seed; butter is in milk; water is underground; fire is latent in wood. Similarly, the omnipresent God is in the human body and the human mind. When one seeks to separate Him and identify Him, one has to make efforts and do spiritual practice. Then, as a consequence of the effort and the spiritual practice one will realize that God is oneself and there is no difference between the two. This is liberation, wisdom, realization, according to the process that Sankara calls the practice (*upasana*) of nondualism (*a-dwaita*).

Now, about worship in qualified nondualism (*visishta-adwaita*). Are seekers to consider the God whom they yearn to adore as different and separate from them or as part of them, associated somehow with them? This is the question.

Now for the answer. The *jiva* is the soul of the body; God is the soul of the *jiva*. Having one's faith fixed thus, adoring God is the means that Ramanuja has propagated. All this cosmos is part of Him; it is in Him. He is the inner Motivator and He is present in all. That Supreme Person can be won only through unflinching devotion (*prapatthi*) and total surrender (*saranagathi*). "You are my all, O my God of Gods. You are my only Master (*Thwameva sarvam mama deva deva*)" —this is the attitude one has to develop and make one's own.

The practice of dualism (*dwaita*) —the soul-Supreme Self (*jivatma-Paramatma*) relationship— is as a wife-husband relationship. The full, free, supreme Vishnu is the husband, the master, the lord, the ruler, the provider; the individual is the ruled, the dependent, the wife. This method of spiritual practice was taught by Madhwacharya.

Without devoted attachment to the lotus feet of the Lord, that is to say, without devotion, liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) and even purity of intellect and emotions are impossible to attain. For those who have the spring of ecstatic devotion to the presence of the Lord within them, though they may not have any texts to ponder over, the very contemplation of the beauty, grace, and power of the Lord will give them bliss of superconscious devotion. One cannot discover what prompts the experience. In that ecstatic mood, they discard all sense of shame and personality and yearn to become the beloved of God, in blissful union. They will then dance and sing aloud and be merged in genuine joy and bliss (*ananda*). Spiritual practices in conformity with this faith were laid down by Madhwacharya.

The agony of the lover to attain the beloved is the true sign of the path of dualism. This was elaborated in a thousand ways by others who came after.

Bhagavad Gita —Gospel of Krishna

The worship (*upasana*) laid down in the *Gita* is incorporated in the *Mahabharatha*, named as the fifth *Veda*. This fifth *Veda* is a veritable treasure-house of gems illuminating the problems that confront people in worldly and spiritual matters. The *Mahabharatha*, a magnificent drama, was enacted by Sri Krishna on the stage called *Dharmakshetra*, where He had collected together all the items he needed for the production. Madhava, that is, Krishna, was director. He collected the participants, the cast, the songs each had to sing, and the words each had to utter and decided on the exits and entrances. He was the actor, the witness, the producer; all roles were He. On one side, immeasurable worldly power soaked in unrighteousness; on the other side, righteousness-filled, limited *Atmic* power. This is the essential charm of the *Mahabharatha*.

This is the *Bhagavad Gita*. The entire essence of the *Mahabharatha* is in it. “I shall do exactly as you order (*Karishye vachanam thava*).” “One can find safety and happiness doing one’s own duties (*Swadharme nidhanam sreya*h).” These are the touchstones of worldly *dharma*.

Neglecting the path of devotion to God (*bhakthi*), which can add unto you all prosperity and progress, those who close their eyes and contemplate on “I am Brahma (*Aham Brahmasmi*)” and suffer from the egotism it confers get only misery as their reward. If the husk is pounded, no rice can be secured. Having no faith in Krishna’s words and going as one’s intellect dictates cannot be the road to ultimate Truth (*Brahma-thathwa*).

The *Bhagavad Gita* has itself taught beyond the possibility of doubt, by means of illustrative descriptions and incidents, that Krishna is the universal Absolute Brahma itself. It is the essence of all *Vedantas*. It is the repository of the nectar churned out of the entire collection of scriptures (*sastras*). It is the sacred stream of Indian spiritual thought, held in one text. Can anyone deny this?