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RELEVANCE OF TRADITIONAL VALUES IN MODERN TIMES

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ABSTRACT:

Modernization refers to usage of the contemporary by imbibing a rational attitude towards issues and their evaluation. It is essentially a pragmatic outlook. At present India with its rich and ancient civilization stands at the crossroad between age old cultural values and modern rational outlook. Rather than a conflict, a blend between the two is sought for our enrichment. Conservation of the old along with fusion with the new can lead to a better balanced society. Modernization of traditional values can be attained through appropriate education. Education alone can enlighten us about our rich past and find means to synthesize it with the modern spirit. The present paper, through a review of literature tries to: trace the values of ancient India; investigate the conflicting modern outlooks; and attempt to find means to attain synthesis between traditional and modern values through education. Through review of literature it is found that India has a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in ancient Vedic philosophy. Since time immemorial education has been the means for propagation of values. Indian values such as tyaga (renunciation), dana (liberal giving), nishtha (dedication), satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) upeksha (forbearance) and so on, built the foundation for Indian society. At the same time education has also lead to the path of scientific enlightenment and modernization. Hence an amalgamation of traditional values and modern outlook can be achieved only through education.

KEYWORDS: Ancient Philosophy, Values, Modernization, Education.

INTRODUCTION:

Values are chosen or imposed principles that aid us to guide our behavior. They are our fundamental viewpoint and help us prefer, accept and choose one thing over another or a behavior over another. Values are also considered as important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. They help us to formulate goals and objectives, whether personal or collective.

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OBJECTIVES: The present paper, through a review of literature tries to:

- Trace the values of ancient India;
- Investigate the conflicting modern outlooks; and
- Find means to attain synthesis between traditional and modern values through education.



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

Values of Ancient India: Ancient Indian values are a reflection of ancient Indian Philosophy. In ancient India life was divided into four *Ashrama* - Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa and the society into four *Varnas* namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Each member of the society had to abide by these stages of life and Varna system. The goal of life was Moksha - freedom from the cycle of rebirth. Prof. K.M. Pannikar holds that, the social structure of Hinduism rests on two fundamental institutions the caste and the joint family. Prof. Raghavan writes, "one of the main concepts which underlies the Hindu attitude to life and daily conduct is that of the four ends of the man (Purusharthas) - Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Fulfillments of all these four objectives are necessary for the self realization of an individual. These four objectives are not independent of each other and should not be viewed in a stand-alone manner. The activity of fulfilling one objective should also compliment the fulfillment of the other objectives. With the passage of time, as one evolves, all objectives do not hold the same importance for him/her. Some of the objectives eventually lose their place and importance to more predominant objectives. During youth the desire to earn wealth may be predominant but with age a person may realize that the pursuit of the ultimate the ultimate goal of life, that is Moksha, is of more importance. The concept of Purushartha in Indian philosophy is integrated with its concept of Ashramas system. While Dharma, Artha, and Kama are followed in the first three stages of life in varying degrees the fourth stage or sanyasa should concentrate on Moksha the ultimate goal of life.

Dharma: The duty of a man during his lifetime is termed as dharma. This involves the physical activities that a person needs to do, at different stages of his life. Dharma is the true calling of a person, what they are born to do. Sometimes a person's dharma is decided by their birth as is seen in the Later Vedic period where the Varna system was predominant. As a person progresses through life his dharma changes. The dharma of a 'bhramahacharya' (first stage of life) is to acquire knowledge and serve his Guru while the dharma of a 'grihastha' (second stage of life) is to perform the duties of family life. The evolution of human soul acts as the inner guide and allows a person to identify their dharma, their true calling.

Artha: Artha or material wealth is the source for acquiring all material comforts in life. It is often thought that the path followed to accomplish spiritual growth and that to acquire material wealth are converse. However this is not true. Only when there are no worries is one able to focus their attention to the goal of union with the Divine. One should not be attached to their possessions or material wealth as it is possible to sought material wealth with detachment. For example, one can perceive material wealth or abundance as a form of the Divine. Once the financial objectives have been acquired the desire to pursue it automatically dies away, paving the way for Moksha.

Kama: Kama refers to fulfillment of one's desires. Human desires can be in various forms - desire to seek power, wealth, recognition, fame, service, etc. It is of utmost importance to fulfill our desires else they remain in a latent state, which may awaken unpredictably causing undesirable consequences. According to Kama purushartha a person should fulfill his desires in this lifetime in a state of awareness and without harming anyone in the process. Only when all our desires are fulfilled or sublimated we can evolve spiritually and reach the ultimate destination



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

• **Moksha:** Moksha means liberation, realization of the Self, and is the ultimate destination of this human birth. It is only in this stage that a person realizes that the individual self is a part of the Supreme Self. Within one's self resides the universe. This realization leads to the experience of union, oneness, with the Cosmos.

Another important aspect of Indian society has been the Varnapratha. Vedic society was divided into four Varnas to facilitate division of labour. However in the later Vedic period it became rigid and was attained by birth. It determined the social hierarchy of man in the society. Every individual is looked upon as a member of a group and every group has its own position in the social hierarchy. Within the family and in the neighbourhood there is the authoritative behaviour from time immemorial. The wife should obey the husband, the child should obey the parents, a person in the village or the neighbourhood should obey the chief man. This social structure is based on birth and social mobility is prohibited. Thus status is based on ascription rather than achievement.

Other important values of ancient India like kinship and kin obligation; ideas of purity and pollution in family, being and becoming, creation and destruction, utilisation and spiritual transcendence, tyaga (renunciation), dana (liberal giving), nishtha (dedication), satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) upeksha (forbearance) and so on, built the foundation for Indian society..

Conflicting Modern Outlooks

In ancient and medieval India the life of common people was conservative and their behaviour was governed by non-utilitarian customs and traditions. Illiteracy and ignorance was the dominant feature of Indian society. This led to creation and persuasion of superstition and dogmas. The economy was simple and economic productivity above subsistence was relatively low. India was an agrarian society. The vast majority of India's population lived in isolated villages and tribal communities. The contact with the British in specific historical situation initiated the process of modernisation in India. Since the beginning of seventeenth century India has been under continuous western influence. Modern cultural institutions and forms of social structure were introduced after the establishment of British rule in India. Western rule did 'set the stage' and established some of the preconditions for modernising Indian society. The British ruler brought about far reaching changes in the culture and social structure of Indian society. In the words of Prof. Y. Singh, the contributions of the colonial administration in the process of modernisation lay in the creation of such networks of social structure and culture which were modern and pan-Indian'.

With the advent of British rule Indian society witnessed national bureaucratic system of administration and judiciary, industrial bureaucracy and army. Longstanding patterns of social organisation were weakened and networks of social structure and culture were created. New social classes - an urbanized labor force, a growing number of local entrepreneurs and, above all a new group of intellectuals whose understanding and aspirations extended far beyond their traditional social groups came forward. Exposure to Western education created new political culture and tradition of nationalism. Growing technology and education created a new structure of technological, professional



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

and intellectual middle class. These modernizing structures had a uniform character throughout the country. Exposure to English language, literature and science provided access to the ideology of liberalism which enshrined the values of liberty, equality, respect for individual, secularism etc.

However the process of modernisation started during British period was segmental and selective. It was not integrated with the micro-structures of Indian society such as family, caste and village community. The process of modernisation was segmental and selective due to the autonomy of these micro- structures and a policy of least interference followed by the British administrators. Conflict arose between traditional and modern outlook. The modern values of equality and liberty were in opposition to the traditional caste based segregation. Stress on human achievement and democracy was opposed to authority and hierarchy attained by birth. At the same time concept of rebirth became redundant and value of moksha took a back seat in life. The industrial, urban and capitalist society laid stress on artha and kama resulting in predominance of attainment of material goals in life. In the post colonial period we witness economic growth with increasing social inequalities, political freedom with foreclosure for existential opportunities, changes in values and definition of the self without elasticity in social structure and social mobility without corresponding evolution of organic consciousness.

Synthesis between Traditional and Modern Values through Education

In India, attraction towards the modern values and love for the traditional ones cause inherent clash between tradition and modernity. Scholars who oppose dichotomous approach say that modernity and tradition are not mainly exclusive. According to them, modernisation does not mean complete rejection of tradition. Scholars like S.C. Dube and Y. Singh are of the opinion that modernity and tradition can co-exit. A synthesis of tradition and modernity is desired today. The traditional beliefs, practices and institutions which dysfunctional should be discarded and modern values which are functional should be imbibed. The age old traditional values have a lot to offer to the modern world. Traditionalism does not mean complete rejection of modernisation neither do modernisation mean complete rejection of traditionalism. It may mean retaining only those elements of tradition which are considered by the society functional. There are elements in the tradition which are of universal importance. Therefore, an attempt has been made to reconcile many elements of tradition with the modern elements. Dr. Shudhakar Chattopadhaya in his book 'Traditional Values in Indian Life', tried to demonstrate that the traditional values of Indian society are no antagonistic to the Western and American values and that these can be retained without sacrificing progress.

The ancient value of Dharma can be practiced even today. The Sanatan Dharma or the universal dharma is believed to form the very base of our existence. From here emerge fundamental ideas of right and wrong that are deeply rooted in our consciousness. Along with this universal dharma dwells our own unique, individual dharma, or swadharma, which is the byproduct of our birth circumstances, karma, and talents, and the choices we make in our life.



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

Dharma means sustaining our life, meeting our family obligations, participating in society. It also involves honoring our ethics doing right by our self, our family, our community, the world. To understand our own dharma we can ask a few key questions: What is my role in the world? What are my compulsions? Which is the right path? Which is the best way to serve all around me? Students can be made to answer these questions in the value education classes.

A lot of importance is attached with the value of Artha at present times. The very aim of education today has changed from acquisition of knowledge, skill, values etc. to a means to acquire money. Artha helps us to acquire basic level of material comfort and possessions needed to fulfill all our objectives in life. To some artha may mean food, clothing, and shelter while to others it may be food, clothing, shelter, a cell phone, and Internet access. The fundamental truth is what we need depends on who we are. Students should be taught that artha means to learn to live skillfully in a world of material objects that exist for our benefit. It's not about rejecting the world, but about figuring out how to be content with the things. Students should be helped to seek answer to the following questions: Knowing my dharma, what do I need to play my role in the world? What are the things that I value most? Do I have enough? Do my possessions make me happy or sad? Do I have too much or too less? What does wealth mean to me besides money?

Desire for pleasure is what drives all human behavior. Each student must be aware of his kama. Introduction to various academic and vocational subjects can help a student find answer to questions like: What am I passionate about? Which activities provide me pleasure? Am I enjoying my life? Am I happy in life? What do I want in life? Are the means to fulfilling my desires, harming others?

The ancient concept of moksha refers to freedom from the cycle of rebirth. Whether rebirth is fact or fiction, the question remains unanswered. Moksha is not some dignified or final state to be reached, only once. It may be redefined and amalgamated as freedom from suffering and from that which is blocking us from realizing our own power and connection to life. Students should be taught to seek answer to questions like: how can I free myself from activities and views that make me unhappy? How can I free myself from my emotions? What do I want to bind myself to? Do I feel trapped? How can I make my mind free?

CONCLUSION:

Some of the basic social institutions of India like family, marriage, gender roles etc. are still based on traditional values. There have been modifications in the traditional value system through amalgamation of modern values. Values are never static and should not be so. Welfare of individual and the society should form the basis of all values. Modernization of traditional values can be attained through appropriate education. Education alone can enlighten us about our rich past and find means to synthesize it with the modern spirit.



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

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