



## A STUDY OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY AS REFLECTED IN EARLY SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Generally all the literature and philosophy including religion have similar say in the matter of humanising the spirit of man or establishment of peace. But Sanskrit literature and thought because of its appealing tone and logical treatment has special importance. There are many ideas put forth by Sanskrit literature and thought which are useful for the establishment of world peace. It is not possible to present a thorough study of these ideas in this short paper and I have to be content with drawing a bare outline. But, I hope, the random references made here are enough to indicate that a detailed study of this literature has a great utility even today in securing peace in the world and making human relations smooth.

**KEYWORDS** : Peace, Prosperity, Sanskrit, Literature, Early India.

The knowledge that man has acquired today is the result of his long struggle for existence and survival. It is a long story of trials and errors, and accumulated experience. During the long history of the march of mankind, there were several periods of glorious achievements and progress in all walks of life and also periods of dismal failures. A continuous narration of this fascinating story for the last twenty five centuries and more are recorded in Sanskrit literature. These are not recent complaints. Sixty five years back, in 1948-49, the University Education Commission regretted the fact that the importance of the study of classics in our languages has not been sufficiently realised.<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit Commission in 1956-57, in its report notes the deteriorating position of Sanskrit learning, both in the traditional style as well as in the schools and Universities. During the last few years the number of students opting for Sanskrit at the secondary schools and universities has fallen so rapidly that Sanskrit departments have begun to be closed in colleges one after another. Sanskrit teachers are being relieved in the name of economy. Apart from the question of unemployment facing Sanskrit scholars, the greater danger of the very tradition and continuity of Sanskrit study being cut off, looms large over the horizon. The bulletin No. 1 of the international Sanskrit Conference also states, "It has been observed recently that owing to marked increase in the subjects of modern knowledge the classics have begun to decline and the younger generation is unfortunately losing the benefits of a branch of study, which has great formative force."<sup>2</sup> This attraction towards the modern subjects and branches of knowledge is due to their utilitarian value. On the same ground, many of the modern educationists sitting in the Government departments as well as those actually working in the field of education i.e. teachers in schools and colleges or universities are committing the fallacy of discounting the valuable treasure of classics in the name of science and scientific age. But, if unqu estioned acceptance of everything old is superstition the unexamined discarding of the same is arrogance which according to Tulsi - the great Hindi Poet is the root of all evil-<sup>3</sup> and therefore of fall. The real scientific attitude is to examine everything that comes by, accept what stands the test, and discard what fails it and march forward on the basis of and making using of all proved data. The educationists had been lured away by the fallacious argument of quick dividends. Let us not forget that even in applied sciences dividends are earned after a long period of patient research and experiments. If the exploration of the moon's surface is justifiable the study of classics is more so. Conquests of the summits of the Himalayas, under-water search of oil, sending rockets to Mars and taking its photographs and hundreds of other research projects in the laboratories world over are certainly not trading in quick dividends.

The great minds in the past have narrated their experience and experiments for the benefit of future generations, but the tragedy is that men and women of the present generation refuse to avail themselves of the wisdom of their forefathers. In India this anomaly

becomes more glaring when viewed in context of the fact that several foreign universities have begun to take increasing interest in this very subject. If, as the Sanskrit Commission says, "the present is after all a continuation of the past";<sup>4</sup> the future is the continuation of the-present and as such in India, the study of Sanskrit must be admitted as a supreme necessity. Even from the utilitarian point of view there are a number of subjects in Ethics and Psychology, in Mathematics and Astronomy, in Medicine and Eschatology to which the ancient lore can contribute greatly. Such fascinating topics as Kayotsarga, Psycho-anaesthetics and Psycho-therapy of Yoga, cures by Pranayama, ethics of economics and high finance invite students and scholars for study. The Sanskrit Commission in its report has also established the importance and usefulness of Sanskrit studies in different branches of knowledge even in modern context.<sup>5</sup> The treasury of the past experiences, experiments teachings and knowledge serves us as the guiding light-house for the solution of our present problems and future progress. I have chosen to discuss in this paper the most vital and pressing problem facing the world today-the problem of peace, and what Sanskrit literature has to offer us by way of aid to its solution.

It is a strange paradox that in search of survival and self-existence man has developed some branches of knowledge leading to just its opposite, namely, the over-all destruction of the human race. Let us first analyse the causes of war. Briefly they are: (1) Personal ambitions and arrogance, (2) racial pride due to the sense of superiority either in religion and culture or strength or prosperity and (3) economic necessity and commercial interest. This is a gradual development of the same tendency of efforts at survival and progress at the cost of others. This tendency creates conflicts between classes as well as peoples resulting into wars. As a result the world had to witness such wars as the invasions of Alexander, the Crusades, and Napoleonic wars and so on. At the top of all we have witnessed two world wars in the first half of this century- the same period when the scientific and technological progress was fastest in the history of mankind. This progress has accelerated in the post-war period and is in the highest gear today. But the result? Is peace any way nearer? Instead, mankind lives in the danger of the third world war breaking out any moment and it would be certainly more disastrous than those two. Large-scaled destructive preparations now challenge mankind to solve the vital problem of survival-a point from where it started originally.

The people of different nations have already realised the supreme necessity of peace. At the end of the First World War, the League of Nations came into existence to serve this very purpose, but it failed and the Second World War broke out within twenty years in 1939. Another effort for peace was made at the end of the Second World War. UNO is the material monument of this effort. But even after twenty five years we are not any the nearer to the solution of the problem. Wars on small scales are still going on in different parts of the world. Western politicians have elaborated the theory of

balance of power which grants at the best ammeasy peace. Slightest change disturbs the balance and the diplomacy starts anew to win the race of power which leads to conflict, Communist ideology seeks the remedy in economic and social equality but as it is based on class conflict it also fails to solve the problem, If the modern age has nothing better to offer for the establishment of peace on our planet than unending wrangles at UNO, stalemate on talks on disarmaments and 260 times more destructive bombs than that dropped on Hiroshima, we should be more humble and be willing to listen the words of wisdom of other ages. The great thinkers of India have throughout the ages thought in terms of peace and so can teach us much in this matter. From the times of the Vedas, India has actively searched for peace. The Yajurveda, for example says: At the end of every religious service there is the recital of santipatha wishing peace and prosperity for all.

At the root of the causes of war enumerated above, there is always a feeling of 'otherness'. When one thinks oneself different from another person or community Ahamkara and Vijigisa, Ambition to conquer the rest out of superiority complex or Bhaya-fear and Vyapadesa- stratagems along with the falsehood and hypocrisy due to inferiority complex instigate mankind to increase and to show strength and power leading to war. The first necessity to prevent war is, therefore, to abolish the sense of otherness between man and man.

It is only in Sanskrit literature that we hear the first loud proclamation of the basic unity of man, albeit the whole creation. If all of us are the manifestations of a single entity there is no basis for any quarrel. For the question- are we all had to think in collective terms for peace, progress and prosperity? Unfortunately, overpowered by Maya illusion or cosmic ignorance, we overemphasise outward diversity of the objects of the world and ignore their ultimate unity with the result that the world seems to us to be a complex mass of objects of opposite characteristics like light and darkness.<sup>6</sup> Svetasvaropanisad says: And that only those who can see this unity can attain lasting happiness, and so he who sees himself in all the objects and all the objects in him does not feel disgust or enmity towards anybody or anything. After realising this unity there cannot be any delusion or grief. This is clearly stated by Isavasvaropanisad in the following words: The fruit of the realisation of the fundamental unity is thus clearly mentioned in the Upanisads themselves. We have to show the seed of this basic ideology in the human society at large to promote eternal peace and happiness. All our effort to establish peace must be based on this sense of ultimate unity and not on the apparent dualism. Then we shall definitely achieve real world peace, we cannot discard this philosophy of ultimate unity as mere idealism without any sound base of reality. Yajnavalkya was a thorough realist. In his spiritual sermon to his wife Maitreyi, the first lesson he gives is, we love and hate the objects of the world not for the sake of those objects, but for our own self.

Naturally, therefore, one should realise this self, and by knowing self, everything becomes known. This self can be contracted and expanded to any extent; Yajnavalkya- further explained this to Maitreyi in the following words: if we think ourselves different from anything else the latter also treats us in the same way. If we identify ourselves with the other things, the latter have no other way than to identify them with us. One generally identifies oneself with one's body only. But there are occasions when one puts aside, forgets this narrow identification and becomes ready to sacrifice this narrow-self for the sake of another fellow, family, locality, co-workers, society, nation and so on. Hence this self is also described thus, in Chhandogyanopanisad. Svetasvaropanisad describes it as follows: and Isavasvaropanisad says: so self can be contracted to one's body or its smallest molecule and be expanded beyond the universe as it is described in Purusa Sukta: so let us realise first that Inspire of our day to day experience of diversity and that of being other from the rest, there are many occasions, when we feel a sense of unity with equal force<sup>7</sup> Apart from the high spiritual point of view, we can illustrate this even by coming down to a lower category of most common experience. A Cricket team of one country wins a test

match with another country and all the compatriots of the winning team feel as if they have won the game. Or again, when Mr. Neil Armstrong, an American, wholly unknown to the outside world puts his first step on the moon, the whole mankind takes pride as if they themselves have reached the moon. Out of these two contradictory experiences one that of unity and the other that of diversity we have to find out which one is true and which is delusion. The theory of evolution put forward by Mr. Darwin also points towards the ultimate unity of all creation.

The scientific researchers also take us nearer to the principle of unity and the field of diversity is getting narrower and narrower. Indian thinkers, then rightly visualised the fundamental unity of all and this realisation has immense psychological force to establish real world peace. We have evidence of the history that whenever man at the helm has experienced this Atmaumyabhava, peace prevails in society. After a highly destructive war in Kalinga, Asoka realised the futility of war and was converted to Buddhism. He eschewed war and instead of armies he sent peace missionaries to different countries. There are many episodes in Sanskrit Pauranika literature of men of peace, non-violently fighting the forces of evil e.g. that of Vasistha, Viskvamitra. Mahatma Gandhi also fought his battles of independence non-violently. Such persons acquire the strength from the realisation of this ultimate unity. But the idea of unity and peace is not given to man ready-made. He has to work for it, cultivate it. Both individual and society have to be trained in it. Gandhi ji also emphasised this need of training. In this connection Mr. Grage has pointed out in his power of non-violence" that strenuous and expensive training is necessary for fighting violent battles. Big armies have to be raised and maintained and constantly kept trimmed at a huge cost; while training for nonviolence is comparatively easier and cheaper. We have to sort out the practical measures of this training and its form. Here again the utility of the study of Sanskrit literature is manifested. To instruct us in the discipline necessary for the realisation of the idea of unity we have the system of Yoga. Those who went under the discipline of Yoga found it so effective that all the systems of Indian thought Brahmanical, Bauddha and Jaina forgetting their schisms have adopted it for their goal of self realisation. Yoga has stood the test of modern logic also and the great Indian thinkers like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Aurobindo, Swami Yogananda and Swami Shivananda have preached it in one form or another. Many westerners like Max Muller, Oldenburg and Evans Wentz also have spoken approvingly of it.

The Chief aim of Yoga is the realisation of the highest truth, as Vacaspati, the famous commentator on Yogasutrabhasya of Vyasa says: For this realisation Yoga lays down in details the process to control over the mind.<sup>8</sup> Patanjali defines: If it is true that all wars have their beginning in the minds of men, the study of a science which teaches the method of controlling the mind is necessary to prevent wars. We have already noted two useful ideas contributed by the Vedanta namely the fundamental unity of all creation and the flexibility of 'self', now Yoga tells us that there are Avidyadi Klesah and different Cittaviksepah which raise obstacles in realisation of the fundamental truth of self. Yoga's great contribution which is shared by the Buddhists and the Jinas as well is that 'Samyaka Jnana' is possible only on the destruction of all these impurities. Different schools lay stress on different impurities but all accept this cardinal principle that impurities of the mind vitiate judgement and obstruct the realisation of truth. The Yoga lies down and elaborates a discipline for the removal of these impurities. In Yoga sutra, Patanjali asserts, by practising different Asanas of Yoga impurities are washed away and right knowledge is manifested. In the discussion that follows Patanjali teaches us several aids to peace which is elaborated by later Yogic schools, either Brahmanical or Buddhist or Jaina. A bare mention of only a few is possible in this short paper, The five-fold self controls including Ahimsa to be effective have to be observed under all circumstances. Secondly, if an erroneous thought e.g. to commit himsa, arises one should concentrate on arguments to the contrary. A beautiful illustration of concentrating on argument to the contrary- Shri Ananda Coomaraswamy in his

"Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism" narrates it thus : ". . . there arose a dispute between the Sakyas and the Koliyas regarding the water of river Rohini, which, because of a great drought, did not suffice that year to irrigate the fields on both the banks. The quarrel rose high, and matters came nearly to battle, when the Buddha proceeded to the place, and took his seat on the river bank, He enquired for what reason the princes of Sakyas and Koliyas were assembled, and when he was informed that they were met together for battle, he enquired what was the point in dispute. The princes said that they did not know of a surety and they made enquiry of the Commander-in-chief, but he in turn knew not, and sought information from the regent; and so on the enquiry went until it reached the husbands men, who related the whole affair. "What then is the value of water?" said Buddha. It is but little," said the princes, "And what of earth?" "That also is little," they said. "And what of princes?" It cannot be measured," they said. "Then would you," said the Buddha, "destroy that which is of the highest value for the sake of that which is little worth?" . . . The princes now reflected, that by the interposition of Buddha much bloodshed had been avoided and that, had it not been so, none might have been left to report the matter to their wives and children'.<sup>9</sup> Had Kaiser and Hitler been made aware beforehand, of the disastrous results of war for their own selves, their own countries and the world at large, they would have been deterred from starting the respective adventures. Thirdly, it should be noted that by following Yoga one attains Samadharma. Bhagavad Gita defines Yoga as also states: He thus attains Atmaupamyabhava, and never practises violence. Yoga teaches us to give others Abhaya and to have it from others there by. Out of fear, we increase our military strength and provoke others also to do so. Our approach is based on dualism. But the realisation of ultimate unity leads us towards Ahimsa and Abhaya.

The Gita characterises such a man in the following words: So Abhaya is also one of the important factors for the establishment of peace. Let there be no misunderstanding. I do not mean to say that peace is possible only if the whole mankind becomes philosophic. But it must be admitted that those who rise to the status of a sage must have a major voice in all affairs of life including politics. Plato wanted the philosophers to be rulers. But Sanskrit literature gives us a more practical idea of rulers guided by philosophers. Shri Ananda Coomaraswamy rightly states, "It is a positive social and moral advantage to the community that a certain number of its finest minds leading a life that may be called sheltered, should remain unattached to social activities and unbound by social ties. And notwithstanding that it is not the purpose of the hermit to establish order in the world, let us remember that the onlooker sees most of the game, it is not without reason that it has become an established tradition of the East that the ruler should be guided by the sage."<sup>10</sup> The Vedanta and the Yoga ideologies are useful in training the individual, and the supremacy of such persons who have undergone such discipline is useful for training the society. Where never this supremacy was accepted peace was established and maintained. This needs no argumentation as it is obvious from the Indian mythology and as well as history. We read in the Mahabharata an episode in which Visvamitra, the King, out of arrogance tried to fetch away by force the cow Kamadhenu Nandini of Vasistha, but he failed and realised : The word 'Gau' is used in the sense of land also, and the significance of this episode is quite apparent that people blessed with nonviolent leadership would be better able to cope with the aggressor. The second idea useful for the society is Varnasrama Dharma. In modern times, the concept of Varna is not much relevant. But Asrama Dharmas are still as much useful as before. Kalidasa describing the characteristics of Raghu dynasty says: There was a healthy tradition in the Raghu dynasty to go to forest for penance in the advanced age after handing over the throne to the eldest son. Because of this accepted tradition the father and the son never quarrelled for throne as they did in a similar renowned dynasty of Mughals. Non-implication of ten years rule passed by the Bhavnagar session of the congress before general election of 1962 led to conflict and split in the organisation. The lesson is clear. The man at the helm should know when to retire gracefully from the post of power and position.

The next useful idea is that there is no evil as such. Kalpasutra states in Dvitiya Bhaga, applying this idea to human relations we realise the politician must learn this alchemy of turning enemies to friends. Chandragupta's minister Chanakya knew this alchemy well. He persuaded Raksasa, his prominent opponent to accept the minister ship of Chandragupta. Visakhadatta has described this in his famous play Mudraraksasa bringing out three useful characteristics (1) appreciation of good qualities of the opponent, (2) minimum coercion and maximum persuasion and (3) everydayness for cessation of conflict. The grudge that Visvamitra bore against Vasistha was similarly removed when he overheard Vasistha acclaiming his (i.e. Visvamitra's) penance as even more glorious than that of the light of the full moon. Personal or communal enmity can be pacified by nobility of heart which is the test of real greatness. Hitopadesa rightly states: In this connection one more point remains to be thought about. When some war-mongers are out to destroy peace or the basic principles of society are involved, at times, battles become inevitable. How it should be faced? Here the Bhagavatgita comes to our help. It un-equivocally declares that under the circumstances fighting becomes a duty-Dharma and should not be shirked- Krishna tells Arjuna. But this does not mean that the Gita teaches violence. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes in "Introductory Essay" a preface to his book 'The Bhagavatgita', "when Krishna advises Arjuna to fight, it does not follow that he is supporting the validity of warfare. The ideal which the Gita sets before us is 'Ahimsa' or non-violence and this is evident from the description of the perfect state of mind, speech and body in chapter VII, and of the mind of the devotee in chapter XII, Krishna advises Arjuna to fight without passion or ill-will, without anger or attachment, if we do not resist in such circumstances it is our spiritual defeat and it encourages the aggressor for further aggression. In our age, Mahatma Gandhi himself a staunch devotee of the Gita successfully experimented with a new synthesis for meeting the evil by non-violent resistance. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, we have to act in the world as it is, while doing our best to improve it. We should not be defiled by disgust even when we are plunged in every kind of loss, bereavement and humiliation. If we act in the spirit of the Gita with detachment and dedication, and have love even for our enemy, we will help to rid the world of wars. On the whole, Sanskrit thinkers have always preached for peaceful co-existence. If under exceptional circumstances one is forced to raise arms one should bear in mind use of arms is for Dharmasanthapana only and that too without any attachment or enmity. In fact Sanskrit ideal seeks highest good of all.

Thus it can be concluded that, utility of studies in Sanskrit literature and thought is thus beyond doubt in the modern world context also. In my opinion in the light of the above discussion of the principles enshrined in Sanskrit literature for safeguarding peace, it may lighten our ways for the solution of modern problems.

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