

SOME BASIC FEATURES OF INDIAN HERITAGE

M.G. Prasad, 1 Osborne Terrace, Maplewood, NJ 07040

Introduction:

Every society through the history of time has developed certain characteristic features that describe that society. These features form the core of the society's thinking. Industrial revolution, technological developments, global communications, world markets, consumerism etc, have made impact on all societies of the world. However, the Indian heritage has retained certain basic features that intrinsically describe its nature. These intrinsic characteristics have sustained the flow of time and are relevant to these modern times. Some of these features namely unity in diversity, tolerance and peace are in the core of Indian heritage. Vedas and Vedic literature are at the roots of Indian heritage. The infinitely large Vedic literature deals with the basic human issues and the spiritual knowledge integrated with its practical aspects that play important role in human life. These few basic features noted above will be discussed briefly.

Unity in diversity

Vedas and Vedic literature declare that there is only ONE SOURCE for the universe and there are infinite manifestations of this ONE SOURCE. However, these infinite manifestations are described in many ways by the wise ones who have realized and experienced this ONE SOURCE. This is the meaning of the well-known mantra "Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti". For example, hunger is common for all beings, however there are infinite types of food that are used to satisfy hunger. Although there are diverse food types that people use to satisfy hunger but hunger itself is one. Another example is that of a tree. In a tree there are infinite leaves coming out of several branches. All the diverse designs of leaves with several branches together make up a tree.

We can see that the life force as breathing is common to all beings. In Bhagavad-Gita (7-7), Lord Krishna says, "Dhananjaya! There is nothing whatsoever higher than Me. As rows of gems are strung on a thread, all these things and beings are strung on Me". In this example, we see that the thread is the unifying element in the necklace. The principle of unity in diversity is the implicit law of nature, universe and life. This principle is termed as Dharma that holds all of us together. In the words of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer of Karnataka, India, "The India (Bharata) is the land in which a massive effort was carried out to discover Dharma. Hence, Bharata is the land and abode of Dharma". However, Dharma can be recognized anywhere in the universe as it is the universal principle. The various literature of India has brought out the basis of dharma in describing the life and living.

Tolerance:

The co-existence of people in harmony with diverse interests is based on the principle of tolerance. The Indian heritage based on the Vedic truths is rooted in tolerance. It is for this reason many religious faiths and cultural assimilations have found its home in India through the history of civilization. Tolerance exists in India because of the underlying principle of dharma namely unity in diversity. It is a very common sight in India that one can see a church, a mosque and a temple in the same neighborhood. The children of various religious and cultural backgrounds are part of the Indian fabric. The large number of languages provides the basic tolerance as an integral part of the Indian society. The various societies of the world such as European, American, Middle-eastern etc can see the principle of tolerance being part of Indian society. The Hindu religion based on the Vedas upholds the principle of tolerance. It recommends betterment of each individual through his or her own birth religion than the notion of conversion. The tolerance can be achieved at an individual level as the individual matures and understands that there are equally good ways compared to one's own. Tolerance is an essential quality required for the survival of the human race because there will be diversity in the external aspects of life. Tolerance is an untold educational experience in Indian society.

Peace:

The direct result of understanding the principle of dharma and practice of tolerance is peace. Achievement of peace at the individual, family, societal and global level is only possible with tolerance practiced based on understanding the principle of unity in diversity. Peace is not absence of war. Peace is absence of fear. Peace is tolerance based on love and understanding. Peace cannot co-exist with even traces of any kind of terrorism or misunderstanding between people. From time immemorial, the Indian society has given importance to all-round peace in its culture. There are large numbers of shanti mantras that are clarion calls for the peace both at individual and collective levels. The Vedic literature emphasized that the very goal of human life is to experience and propagate that inner peace. The Indian heritage in all its literature gives high importance to Peace.

Concluding remarks:

The principle of unity in diversity, tolerance and peace are all inter-related and need one other for co-existence. The Indian heritage emphasizes this in well-known saying that "Sarve Janah Sukhino Bhavantu" which means that 'May All People be Happy' . This is only possible by having the goal of peace achieved through the practice of tolerance based on the understanding the principle of unity in diversity.

Dr. Prasad is a professor of mechanical engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology. He is chairperson of the Hindu temple in Bridgewater, NJ. He has published three books. He is a spiritual disciple of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer, Karnataka, India.