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Opinion

Sanatan Dharma is the way if the world is to be saved, rest is just cult



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When it comes to philosophy and spirituality, the discourse often becomes dense. But in our endeavour to understand Sanatan Dharma, we will proceed with simple definitions and queries.

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Sanatan: The word 'Sanatan' refers to that which is timeless – having neither a beginning in time, nor an end. Everything that is in time has a form, limit, name, attributes, and changes. So, Sanatan, by definition is that which is formless, infinite, nameless, attributeless, and unchangeable.

Dharma: It refers to eternal obligation, or the law eternal. The human being has several responsibilities, but the most fundamental one is towards themselves. This most fundamental responsibility is freedom from suffering and inner limitations. It could also be called attainment of joy or inner fulfilment.

Those are the literal definitions. But what is the problem we are addressing?

In human existence, everything around has been changing. The world of today has very few similarities to that of the caveman. However, what has remained constant is the disquiet, restlessness, and suffering within us. We have been greedy, fearful and ignorant – fifty thousand years ago, five thousand years ago, and today. So many other problems — in science, economics and medicine, for example — have been solved, but the problem of the unfulfilled mind remains. This constant problem is what we need to address.

So, the restlessness of the mind is the problem at hand?

Yes, the needless suffering. The human mind is full of objects it thinks of, and dwells in. These objects all have forms, names, attributes. These objects are mindstuff. And the mind is forever restless because of being occupied with these objects. In deep sleep, all objects in

the mind disappear, hence we feel at rest and rejuvenated. Sometimes these objects provide happiness, at other times, misery. But even the happiness is short-lived and insecure and dependent on randomness. If the mind could somehow forever be in a state of freedom from these objects, then it would be the ultimate joy of living.

For whom is Dharma? Dharma is for the mind (or the ego), because it is the mind that suffers.

It is obvious. Because I do not know myself, I think of myself as incomplete. Because I take myself as incomplete, I start looking around for stuff to associate with. Because I look at stuff with greedy eyes, I just see what I want to see (projection), and not the reality. Because I manage to see what I desire to see, I quickly associate myself with some desirable object. Because I am not what I think I am, and the object is not what I think it is, hence the association is a false union.

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What does this false union result in?

It results in destruction of the object (climate change, slaughter of billions of animals each day, biodiversity loss, ecological disasters, exploitation of fellow human beings in all ways possible). And to the subject (me), it brings disillusionment, unfulfillment, and the epidemic of mental disease.

The subject remains trapped their entire life in a low orbit of sub-optimal and compromised existence, which is suffering, and wastage of this precious life.

So that's what ails me – false union. But why do we get into that?

We have already mentioned. 'Because I do not know myself, so I think of myself as incomplete'. The child is born physically conditioned. The first impulse is 'I am this body, and I am so little, and so dependent on this world'. Later on, the society and education further reinforce this impulse.

Knowing oneself means knowing one's desires, their root, one's tendencies, seeing where one's thoughts and emotions come from, seeing the origin of one's various identities, observing the process of conditioning in action. But our education system places very little emphasis on education of the self via self-observation.

This is scary. What should I do now?



To understand the broader implications of Sanatan Dharma, we can look at how the **Indian Constitution follows Sanatan Dharma principles**, which serve as a universal code of conduct for all citizens.

In other words, we are now asking: what is my responsibility towards myself? That responsibility is what is called Sanatan Dharma: My responsibility to know myself, and the exact nature of my bondages (self-knowledge or Atmagyan), and to give myself complete inner freedom and the actualisation of my highest potential.

In spiritual parlance, it would mean the movement of the 'I' self into the true self (Atma).

Who can be called a Sanatani?

Anybody who enquires into the ego-self via self-observation, with the intention to rid oneself of all false beliefs, identities, and associations. The final goal of the Sanatani is the joy and liberation of Jivanmukti (fully liberated while alive).

So, the Sanatani doesn't wait for death to reach a mystical other-world?

No, Sanatan Dharma is about being liberated of one's misery here and now.

Sanatan Dharma sounds good. But what is its relation with contemporary Hinduism?

Little actually. Sanatan Dharma is enunciated in the philosophy of Shruti (Vedanta – Upanishads, 2500-3000 years old). While today's Hinduism is largely based on the beliefs of Smriti (Puranas for mythology and Dharmashastras for social conduct, 800-1200 years old) and the rituals of Agam Shastras (even more recent). Unfortunately, the philosophy of Vedanta has reached comparatively very few among Hindus. Today's Hinduism is largely a heterogeneous mass of myriad beliefs, traditions, dogmas and superstitions. It should have been very close to Sanatan Dharma, but it is not. A lot of what is practiced as Hinduism is actually in direct contradiction of Sanatan Dharma.

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In the scriptures, and in the field of religion, how will I recognise if I am reading something related to eternal Sanatan, versus something that's ephemeral and ordinary?



If you find emphasis on words like Ajar (ageless), Amar (deathless), Avinashi (indestructible), Nitya (timeless), Ajaat (unborn), Nirakar (formless), Nirgun (attribute less), Agam (impenetrable), Agochar (imperceptible), Achintya (unimaginable), Akaal (Timeless), Nirmal (pure), Niranjan (blemish less), Sakshi (witness), Akhand (unbreakable), Nirvikaar (flawless), Advait (Non-dual), etc, then probably the Sanatan is being referred to.

On the contrary, if you come across the common mind stuff (fear, temptations, stories, imaginations, beliefs, superstitions) even in the name of religion, then you should be wary.

What would a society based on Sanatan Dharma be like?

It would have very few social laws. Just an open environment (Sanskriti) conducive to enquiry, experimentation, questioning, and freedom of mind. Education in both the material and the self would be given paramount importance. It would be a very liberal society flourishing in creativity and fearless compassion. With the spirit of investigation into the external and the internal, science and arts would blossom alike in this society.

Where to, from here?

If the individual and the world is to be saved, Sanatan Dharma is the way. Please reflect: If Dharma is true, it has to be Sanatan. And if Dharma is not Sanatan, all it can be called a cult, a belief system, or a mass hysteria. Sounds familiar?

Acharya Prashant is a spiritual teacher. Views are personal.

