



Revisiting the Idea of Universal Brotherhood : Locating through the Lenses of Ancient Indian Literatures

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ABSTRACT

India has the oldest and most glorious past in the world. The whole world considers the land of India as the source of spiritual knowledge. A glimpse of all the various civilizations, cultures, values of the world can be found in the Indian society from antiquity due to which India has earned the title of the Vishva Guru Bharat. The Indian literature exhibits the pluralistic character of Indian society. With the quality of tolerance and compassion of all cultures, the Indian society at its core promotes the feeling of Universal Brotherhood. The idea of the Universal Brotherhood which comprises all the living beings can be found in ancient Indian literature. The Mahaupanishad gives the message of "Vasudhaiv Kutumbhakam" (which means the world is one family). The Vedas ~too~also give the idea, "Let noble thoughts come from all the directions." The Ramcharitramanas clearly state its core principle: "Parhit Saris Dharam Nahi Bhai." Traces of other religious texts such as Jainism and Buddhism could also be found to promote the concept of universal brotherhood. As Mahavira also said, "Do not injure, abuse, oppress, enslave, insult, torture, or kill any creature or living being." Buddha's conception of universal brotherhood included everyone and all has the same religious faith. The proposed paper will focus on the different religious texts of ancient Indian literature on their idea of Universal brotherhood. It will also take into account the relevance of the Universal Brotherhood in the 21st century as it is seen as a better tomorrow for the world.

KEY WORDS

Vishva Guru Bharat, Tolerance, Compassion, Universal Brotherhood.

INTRODUCTION

The recent scenario of the global pandemic has led to the emergence of certain important issues that were shadowed under ignorance before. Among the various issues like Universal Basic Income, Citizenship, and Rights, this paper intends to locate the idea of universal brotherhood that was seen at large in practice during the pandemic. Thus, revisiting the great idea through the perspective of ancient Indian kinds of literature. The Indian past could be seen as one of the richest cultures as till today it has made its ancient cultural values alive in the whole world. One of the core values that the concept of universal brotherhood promotes is Vasudhaiv Kutumbhakam which means that the entire world is one family. The golden quote “We are powerful because of our unity but we are even more powerful because of our diversity” contributes to strengthening the idea of Universal brotherhood. The concept of Global Justice enfolds within it the idea of universal brotherhood where it demands a moral obligation of the world’s rich people to the world’s poor people. Through this welfare activity, one could see a reduction in global poverty. This paper would mainly focus on certain portions of ancient Indian literature to discover the idea of universal brotherhood. The paper is divided into the following sections:

1. Global Justice and the perspective of Universal brotherhood,
2. Hindu texts- (A) Upanishad/ Vedas (B) Ramayana (C) Bhagavad Gita,
3. Buddhist texts, and
4. Jainism texts.

In contemporary times, this concept of Universal brotherhood has achieved a milestone. This could be seen in reference to the Covid’ 19 pandemic where there was a feeling of cooperation, social integration, and humanity among all the different societies, cultures, and communities. The various verses and texts would be analyzed to locate the core idea of universal brotherhood and its significance from antiquity.

1. Global Justice and the Perspective of Universal Brotherhood

Global Justice is considered to be a component of the normative international relations theory which largely focuses on the moral obligation of the world’s rich people to the world’s poor people. The main idea that it carries is to reduce global poverty. Thomas Pogge’s idea of Global justice promotes the feeling of universal brotherhood. His idea of global justice certainly applies that no one should harm others. His concern with regard to poverty is that the rich countries and the citizens are collectively responsible for harming many in the poor countries through the global economic order that is imposed by them. So, according to him, Global Basic Income would be the best plan to raise funds through a Tobin Tax towards poverty eradication. He stressed the essentiality of basic income that could help to eradicate poverty. This step involves everyone towards an equal platform thus imparting the feeling of the Universal Brotherhood.

2. Hindu Text

A. Vedas / Upanishad

In the Vedic tradition, the thoughts and ideas for universal brotherhood have been an age-old concept. The concept of universal brotherhood is seen as part and parcel of the Indian tradition from the Vedic times. The Vedic tradition is considered to proclaim several aspects that throw light on the concept of Universal brotherhood. It could be seen that Vedas signify that all sons and daughters belong to the almighty god. There is no difference that is looked at between big and small, high or low, etc but all are equal in the eyes of God.

It is also said by one of the Vedic Rishi that one should always live in a friendly way. One of the Shloaks from the Vedic tradition:

“सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामया,
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद् दुःख भागभवेत् ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः (वहदारण्यक उपनिषद्)”

The above shloka explains: “Let all be happy, let all free from diseases, let all see auspicious things and let nobody suffer from grief”. Another shloka from the Vedic tradition:

“माता भूमि पुत्रोहं पृथिव्या” (अथर्ववेद)

The above shloka explains that all human beings are sons of Mother Earth. (Atharva Veda). Therefore the Vedic Tradition brings into account through its texts that there should be no other option but only to have a feeling of Universal brotherhood.

Another shloka which says:

“अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघु चेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् । (महा उपनिषद्)”

This signifies that the whole world is one family. (Mahaupanishad)

A shloka from the Rig Veda which says:

“संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वं सञ्जानाना उपासते ।। (ऋग्वेद)”

The Rig Veda teaches the people to move together, speak together and make the minds of one accord. It also asks us to live together in harmony and pray for the welfare of all.

Various shloka's speak of the idea of universal brotherhood such as:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा. मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् । ((ईशोपनिषद्)”

exhibits that one should hold on to things as per their needs and requirements and not run after greed.

B. Ramayana

Valmiki Ramayana is an ancient epic of India, highly valued for its contribution to human values for centuries, and has universal relevance. It consists of 24000 verses in seven Kanda's, namely Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Yuddha Kand followed by Uttara Kanda. Ramayana depicts a great picture of universal brotherhood. Throughout it showed an ideal frame where not only people irrespective of their caste, gender, race, occupation came together for a noble cause but all animals and birds were seen supporting the king to fight the evil. To analyze the concept of universal brotherhood in different contexts could be seen as:

- i. From the very beginning to look at, the kingdom of Raja Dashrath had people working from any caste, gender, and race. All were looked at with the same empathy and kindness. All worked with faith and love.
- ii. In the later phase, when Rama grew old, he helped the saints, the people of his kingdom, and everyone including living and non-living creatures to live with peace, happiness, and attain salvation. He promoted happiness and safety among all his people. This shows to promote the concept of universal brotherhood in which everyone is seen as equal and all are looked after with the same love.

- iii. The idea of Universal Brotherhood was not the idea limited to the duties of the king but could also be located in the various other incidences that took place. Brotherhood could be seen as an example of the friendship between Rama and Kevat, and Rama giving Kevat equal importance as others in his ritual functions. This depicts that even Kevat was a helmsman but Rama placed him in a superior place and kept him close to his heart.
- iv. Another incidence that throws light on the idea of universal brotherhood is the friendship of Rama with the leader of the monkey's army (Vanar Sena)- Sugriv. Their ideal friendship, loyalty, and selfless devotion toward each other frame the beautiful concept of universal brotherhood. Throughout the journey till the victory of Rama over Ravana, the selfless contribution of all the animals depicts that the brotherhood concept has a very large base and is practiced of all kinds.

C Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta

The literature in Bhagavad Gita revolves around the concepts of Dharma, Karma, and Duties that build the foundation of the Universal Brotherhood. The verses in the Bhagavad Gita where Lord Krishna enlightens Arjuna through his teachings could locate the concept of universal brotherhood. It could be seen as:

“अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी । 12.13
सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिय मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः । 12.14”

One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me – such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me. (BG 12.13–14)

“लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः कल्मषाः ।
छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः.. 5.25.”

Those who are beyond the dualities that arise from doubts, whose minds are engaged within, who are always busy working for the welfare of all living beings and who are free from all sins achieve liberation in the Supreme. (BG 5.25)

“सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥ 18.66”

Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear. (BG 18.66)

“समौऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः ।
ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषु चाप्यहम् । 19.29”

I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all. But whoever renders service unto Me in devotion is a friend, is in Me, and I am also a friend to him. (BG 9.29)

3. Buddhist Text

In the ‘Teachings of Buddha’, one could find that in chapter 1 under the section of Brotherhood, Buddha emphasized that there are duties of the brotherhood. A renunciant should be the one who could maintain an alert mind, keep both body and mind under control, should resist all tendencies towards greed, anger, foolishness, sleepiness, inattention, regret, suspicion, and keep aside all the worldly desires. Thus, a true renunciant would only have the purpose to attain enlightenment.

Buddha further elaborated in his teachings that the mission of the renunciant is to wake up the sleeping people, correct the false ideas, help people to develop a correct viewpoint, and should go everywhere to spread the teachings even at the risk of his own life and to have sympathy for everyone.

One needs to be concerned about the four things who wish to teach Buddha's teaching:

- To be a good teacher of Dharma, the renunciant is expected to have his feet on the ground of endurance, think about the emptiness of things, and practice non-attachment to anything.
- A renunciant is expected to avoid those living evil lives and avoid opposite-sex interactions. Therefore, this would lead to his friendly nature and will not blame and abuse other people.
- Only if he keeps his mind peaceful and considers Buddha as his spiritual father and other renunciants as his teachers and looks upon everyone with great compassion, then only he would teach equally.
- His spirit of compassion should reach out to everyone looking toward the path of enlightenment and should follow his wishes with an unselfish effort to awaken the interest of the other people in the process of enlightenment. Thus, the one resting in the bosom of Buddha by faith possesses the following qualities:

They are kept aside from the selfish mind, are away from their possession, the mind is full of compassion for all people, there won't be any distinctions made among the people and will treat all people alike and treat everyone with uniform kindness.

Buddha's teachings also teach one to cleanse their minds and to nourish everything without partiality. Therefore, a mind that builds compassion for all the people who are poor becomes a mother to all and looks upon all as personal friends, and gives respect to their parents. In Buddha's teaching, the one without harmony cannot be called to build brotherhood. Therefore, Buddha's taste of universal purity is to see oneness in everything.

4. Jain Texts

Mahavira, the 24th and the last Tirthankara of the Jain religion was the founder of Jainism. If we look into the teachings of Mahavira, among the aspects that were focused on was the concept of ahimsa or non-violence. Mahavira emphasized the importance of "ahimsa" or "non-injury" to human beings including animals, birds, and plants. It could be analyzed that the brotherhood concept is reflected in his teachings on ahimsa.

This principle of ahimsa was of three types:

- The use of harsh language.
- Mental violence or exhibiting ill-feeling towards the other person .
- The physical violence involves activities like killing.

Another aspect that could be looked into is the "caste system" that Mahavira focused on and according to which he preached the universal brotherhood. He has a non-belief in the caste system.

Mahavira also preached the concept of equality and universal brotherhood. He mentioned that all are equal whether it's men or women irrespective of their caste/creed. There should be a feeling of compassion toward every little creature on earth. His emphasis was on all the living creatures irrespective of their shape, size, developed or under-developed- are all equal and should be loved and respected. This way he preached the gospel of universal love.

Way Forward

The idea of Universal brotherhood which holds its relevance from the ancient times could also be very well seen during the contemporary times of the Covid' 19 Pandemic. The coming together of all in this situation of global pandemic depicts the essence universal brotherhood. Universal brotherhood carried the feeling of love, care, support, selfless duty towards every individual to live together with peace and harmony.

11th September is observed as the historic day to celebrate Universal Brotherhood when Swami Vivekananda in 1893 delivered his speech in Chicago. In his speech he not only discarded the idea of religious supremacy but also gave the idea of religious acceptance and mutual tolerance. The core idea of universal brotherhood gets reflected in his speech. Vivekananda could also be regarded as the first political thinker of modern times to advocate the service for the poor as the core value of religion. This relevance could be clearly witnessed during the pandemic where the whole world came together and joined hands for the welfare of all irrespective of the status of human beings. On the similar lines the idea of Integral Humanism given by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay is the idea of unity of individual and society. It is not the idea of man versus nature but the oneness of nature with man. The idea of oneness is not physical versus spiritual, but their oneness. In India, it has been called a religion, 'Yato Abhyudaya Nishreyas Sansiddhi Sa Dharma'. That is, it is the idea of oneness of individual, samashti, creation and Parameshthi. Unity lies in totality. In the absence of totality, human beings are affected by fragmentation. Just as there is the totality of the universe, so is the totality of the individual. Person means not only body, he has mind, intellect and soul also. Peace, harmony, fraternity will develop in the world through person building. Lastly, if the seed of the ancient Indian tradition gets water of fraternity and affection for all then the fertile land of universal brotherhood with the harmony of cultural-spiritual consciousness of India will be the witness of many Kalpa-trees.

CONCLUSION

India as the source of spiritual knowledge due to its diversity in all forms has gained the title of Vishva Guru Bharat. The core idea of Indian literature has always promoted the very essence of the Universal Brotherhood. This very essence has not only helped unite the people of India but through its manifold has reached to unite at the international apex. To survive in a world as complex and dynamic, there is a crucial need to promote and add significance to the feature of the Universal Brotherhood so that all the people in the world can live together peacefully.

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