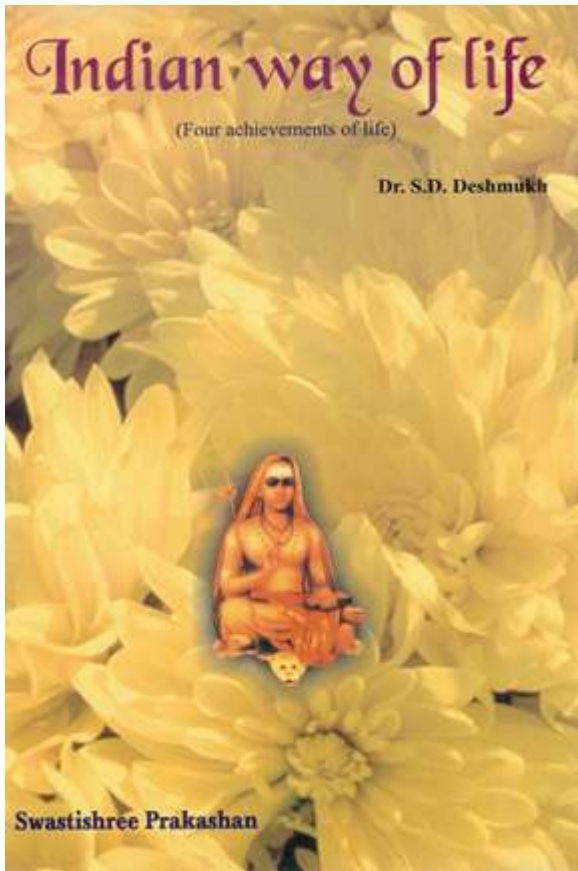




॥ श्री ॥

Indian way of life (Four achievements of life)

Indians are proud of their ancient culture and heritage though, modern and western cultures have made some bothersome inroads into its terrain. Ancient Indian sages, seers and spiritual leaders evolved a way of life that could fulfill the ultimate purpose and aim of human life.

This purpose is 'MOKSHA' or salvation. Human life is expected to be directed in this direction. Moksha, no doubt, is the foremost achievement but it is not the first. It is based on three pillars of DHARMA, ARTHA, and KAMA. Dharma regulates personal and social life. Artha supports life materially throughout its span. Kama, within the limits of Dharma, allows fulfillment of all human desires.

From an Indian philosophical point of view, Dharma is not religion as conceived by western thought. In vedic times there was no such thing as religion, least of all the conflicting, aggressive and spreading religion, seeking to destroy vedic way of life. The vedic way now is termed as Hinduism in relation to Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, which simply did not exist during the vedic times. It is only because of the inherent strength of vedic way of life that it survived the political and religious aggressions, suppressions and oppressions for thousands of years. Indian saints, in absence of political will, sense of nationalism, pride of ancient culture and selflessness on the part of the ruling community, sustained Indian way of life throughout these years of turmoil and barbaric destruction. --

Human being is indebted, right from the time he comes of his age, to his ancestors, family, society, his faith (Institutions that propound the way of life) and the nation. We Indians talk in terms of repaying the debt and not in terms of service to them all. When one repays the debt he or she has the sense of relief and not of giving. It never nourishes ego and expect return of service. --

We have already made a few remarks on dharma, the first pillar that supports moksha (salvation) It is essentially all about our duties towards self, family, community, and the nation. We have described how to repay debts of family, community and nation.

Here, without going in for its repetition, we will think of it from a different angle. Very nature of a thing is called its 'dharma'. Coldness is nature of ice and hence it is its dharma. In the same way humanity must be the dharma of a human being. Every person must be human enough to be entitled to call himself a man, Love, compassion, tolerance, uprightness, integrity, etc. are the hallmarks of humanity. Any person or a community devoid of these virtues cannot belong to

human dharma so ardently talked about by the progressive social thinkers.

Vedic thinking expects all the people of all the four age groups to build themselves for a definite purpose in life. This is where idea of 'Ashram' or stage or phase of life is to be considered. 'Brahmacharya' is meant for the age group between eight and twenty years. Grigasthashram is for the age group between twenty and fifty years. Vanprasthashram for fifty and sixty years and the rest of life for Sanyasashram. This is a rough estimate and can be modified with time and circumstances and on individual qualities. --

Vanprasthashram is the third phase of life. Vana is forest. Life, as lived in forest, is the requirement of this ashram. This means partial withdrawal from the family, social life, politics, business etc. at the age of about fifty five. This withdrawal helps to minimize the pains of generation gap and embarrassment due to social changes.

Man and wife may face problems of physical fitness and may need to stabilize themselves physically and emotionally. This is the time to give more time for spiritual pursuits which were understood during last two ashrams.---

Sanyasashram is the last phase of organized human life and is quite peculiar to Indian thinking. Sanyasa may be entered into by traditional rites or simply by renouncing the 'me and mine' frame of mind. This renunciation takes a lot of courage, determination and training. The wife, if surviving, is to be entrusted to the son or daughter by her consent. Smaller and mobile families of the modern times may not be suitable to accommodate an old woman and hence this phase of life may be lived by the twosome with provisions for bare necessities for the sustenance of life. All the time is to be used for definite, well defined spiritual pursuit for moksha.

Artha is the second pillar which supports life throughout its total span. 'Artha' has a very broad meaning and includes almost all activities of life. Business, industry, politics, defense, farming, intelligence system and governance are all included in 'Artha'. Anything to be achieved is called as artha. Money, of course is central to all these achievements and hence 'artha' has come to be known as money. In personal life money has to be earned by fair and legal means. if it is earned in any other way, it may support life but it will definitely hurt the mind for rest of the life. The spiritual pursuit, expected during the next phases will be jeopardized. Purity and tranquility of mind are absolutely necessary for moksha. A person definitely suffers by any action that is immoral and illegal, even if it is undetected and unpunished. They always cause apprehensions, fear and a sense of guilt. These in their turn, cause compensatory aggression, self serving philosophy and increase in vices. This is the morass which gradually swallows the miserable life and moksha remains a distant dream. ---

'Karma' or human desires is the third pillar that supports moksha. This statement may appear contradictory, but it is a fact of life. Man, as a rule, is full of desires. Unfulfilled desires, in the form of 'WASANA' is responsible for the cycle of births and rebirths. --

Artha, if perverted, elbows out dharma and kama, if not restrained, throws out moksha. Dharma and moksha are the most important aspects of Indian way of life. Artha and Kama are subservient. Man, without allowing himself the pleasures of natural instincts, may never be able to achieve moksha. Exceptions of great saints only prove this rule.---

Almost every Indian follows the path of salvation in his own way with his own notions, conceptions and misconceptions. Pseudo spiritualists take many ignorant people for a ride and therefore spirituality is big business in India. All said and done the genuine Indian way of life still survives the wrath of its detractors, who, though small in number, are quite vocal and influential. Genuine seekers need not worry about it as the teachings of scriptures and great saints are freely available. Let us all pray to Ishwara to guide us and lead us to Moksha.
