

Family in Nation Building – A Vedic Perspective

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It is true that family is the basic unit upon which society and thereby the nation is built. A loving family generates all round love and if a good number of such families are nurtured in this way, it would naturally lead to good society and thereby a very good nation. Many concrete steps have been taken by the State, by individuals and by NGOs in ever so many ways to see how we can eventually build up such a healthy nation. Yet there is much more left to be done.

Now from the vedic perspective, the basis for looking at such a topic will be the familiar vedic aphorism ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakam’ which literally translates as ‘All on earth is but one family’. On a simple analysis we see that the vedic understanding of the ‘family’ or the ‘nation’ has a much broader and deeper insight. Here the meaning of ‘family’ is not restricted to just human beings but extends to or includes all animals, plants and the basic earth constituents i.e. nature itself. On the other hand the notion of ‘nation’ extends to the entire earth / universe. Thus for overall goodness and well being, man has to be in harmony not just with other human beings but also with all other living entities, (plants and animals) and our environment. Yet, the onus of maintaining goodness almost always rests on man. Why, because animals and plants do not violate nature’s laws, rather they are at the mercy of man and his actions. Greed, lust and envy drive man to exploit nature and other living entities thereby upsetting the fragile harmonious equilibrium on earth to humans, animals, plants and the environment. Therefore, even from the Vedic angle, the human family unit remains the key starting point in this endeavor for all around goodness. How do we go about training this family unit? In particular how one has to be trained to control lust, greed and envy?

In fact, in the Bhagavad Gita (5.29), Lord Krishna says:

Bhoktaram yajna-tapasam sarva-loka mahesvaram
Suhrdam sarva-bhutanam jnatva mam santim rcchati.

A person in full consciousness of me, knowing me to be the ultimate beneficiary of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all creation, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, attains peace from the pangs of material miseries.

And this is considered the foundational basis for having peace on this planet. The recognition here is that there is a Supreme Lord, The Creator and when we fully surrender to Him accepting to *co-exist* with all living entities and the environment, then and only then peace can be achieved.

Whereas the principle of living in balance with nature seems reasonable and obvious, how morality can be cultivated is not immediately clear. Elsewhere the vedantic philosophy makes it clear that it is impossible to have moral values without accepting a supreme authority. The point being man on his own will not be able to come to a consensus on morals i.e. what is right and what is wrong. Conception will vary from person to person, will depend on time / age, place and circumstance. So, a universal law of morals is impossible to achieve. It can be argued and shown that morality depends on a larger goal whether short term or long term. Like knife cannot be termed good or bad. It depends on how it is utilized. Even the extreme act of killing a person may be condemned under one circumstance and glorified under another. Spiritual knowledge provides this larger context – the goal of human life based on which ‘morality’ comes into force / play. This goal is what a true Religion is expected to present scientifically.

The salient point coming out of this understanding is that we may in a general materialistic way organize our activities or the world in the best of ways possible, however, unless we have inculcated genuine values by accepting the knowledge about God’s creations and its functioning and obeying the authority of the Supreme Lord, we cannot have a peaceful world.

Since the family becomes an independent complete unit, it is at this stage that the family as a whole and the individuals within have to be deeply aware of the many issues that are disturbing mankind today. I am referring here to air, water pollution, misuse of nation’s resources, wanton killings, and uncontrolled industrialization and of course, the more deep-rooted human element involved in all this, i.e. envy, lust and greed that we already discussed.

As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, “There is enough in this world for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed”. So from a vedic perspective, each member of the family and the family as a whole needs to be educated on these issues, i.e. the limitation of science and technology and the Science of God.

The problem is that science of God is not being presented systematically today in society at large. Most importantly though modern science and technology have given us so many material benefits, it has at the same time created an illusion that all problems in this world including ‘values’ can be resolved through science alone. That science and technology do not have inherent values is not being broadcasted properly.

The second illusion that has been unfortunately propagated is that the knowledge of God whether it is coming from Bhagavad Gita, Bible, Koran or any other genuine spiritual books is not scientific and is based on blind faith. Whereas illusion No.1 may have been exposed due to the resultant negative effects of technology, the 2nd illusion is so subtle that it has missed everyone’s notice.

For all the above it must be demonstrated to one and all that this knowledge of God is a science. It is not based on blind faith as is being commonly understood. This, I will explain in a little more detail.

We tend to think that knowledge we get in school, college and in other higher forms of education is systematic and scientific but knowledge that is presented in Bhagavad Gita, Bible, Koran etc. is not scientific. It is just based on blind faith. Here I would like to point out that all knowledge in school, college and elsewhere is actually based primarily on faith. When we went to pre-primary school we accepted the alphabetic system based on faith. We never questioned why ‘A’ sign is called by the phonetic sound ‘A’ and not by the phonetic sound of ‘B’. Meaning we did not ask for proof but did we lose out in the whole process? No, rather we learnt the English language by having faith in our pre-primary teachers and this faith extended all through our lives. So much so, that if we see a Times of India issue which says that there was an accident in Kanpur, two trains collided, ten people died and 200 were injured and hospitalized etc. we do not say, hey, I do not believe this I am a scientist; unless Times of India takes me to Kanpur to see the accident and I see 10 dead bodies and 200 injured people in the hospital and only then I will

believe. No, we do not do that, we believe it, why, because we have faith in the newspaper. Why, because it is authorized and reputed.

The significant point in the above discussion is that we get most of our knowledge not by having blind faith but by having faith in proper authorities that is, pre-primary teacher, high school teacher, parents, established newspaper and so on and so forth. We use reason and logic to establish a few things here and there but it is always based on large amount of information which we have gathered on faith. Similarly we must put faith on authorized Spiritual literature and study them and act upon them.

So, family as a unit and as individual member needs to be trained in seeing things this way, so that they may similarly educate others. Values come into play when the spiritual process recommended is strictly followed.

One may tend to think that this is a utopian or idealistic aspiration which cannot be achieved in today's circumstances, but than that is only because of one's conditioning. At the very least one should have at least an ideal situation in mind towards which we can all work for?

In the ancient vedic tradition, the king was called Raja rishi which means not only is he the king in modern sense of the word, but he is also a Rishi which means he is well versed with the spiritual goal recommended by the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures and it is his duty to see that all the citizens are oriented towards this spiritual goal in their respective capacities. Thus the key point here is that to achieve real peace, spirituality or surrender to God is a necessity.

So, from Vedic point of view this education about our dependence on the Supreme Lord must start in the very beginning of one's life. Naturally the family becomes the prime entity in developing this knowledge and thereafter this culture must be reinforced in schools, colleges and beyond. Thus, we can build not only a good nation but also a great world, a great earth. I am sure, this is the essential teaching of all religions.