

Abstract

Relevance of Brahmanatva in the 21st Century: What Can we Learn from the Past?

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To effectively address the relevance of Brahmanatva in the twenty-first century, one must first identify past actions and their associated values which best exemplify Brahmins. Using these actions and values as a guide, we can establish an updated framework for the application of Brahmanatva in the present day.

While there are many values that seem to frequently be associated with Brahmanism, I would like to focus on three concepts that are prevalent both in the religious texts as well as the historical literature. Thus, these values are not just defined in theory, but are also manifested through the actions of individuals. I define these three core values of Brahmanatva as the following: i) the creation and dissemination of knowledge, ii) public service and responsibility, and iii) freedom from materialism. Creation and dissemination of knowledge in all fields, including arts, music and culture is well documented. However, it seems the focus in the recent past has gone away from creation and just centered on dissemination. Brahmins did a tremendous amount of public service with honesty, integrity, and impartiality. All of this was done in the context of freedom from materialism. In my talk, I will elaborate these points to capture the salient features that have been critical to the success of Brahmanatva in the past. These features will form the core of the discussion as we develop the updated framework. We shall relate them to present day Brahmins and non-Brahmins. ■

ॐ भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्यजत्राः ।
स्थिरैरङ्गैः स्तुष्टुवांसस्तनूभिर्व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Om bhadram karnebhiih shrinuyam devah bhadram pashyemaksha bhiryajatrah,
Sthirai rangaih stushtuvan sastanoobhirvyashema devahitam yadayuh.
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih.*

“Om. O Gods, may we hear with our ears what is auspicious. O you adorable ones, may we see with our eyes what is auspicious. May we sing praises to you and enjoy, with strong limbs and body, the life allotted to us by the Gods.”
Om Peace, Peace, Peace

(Shantipatha, Prashna Upanishad)