
Practice of Vedic Sanatan Dharma

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The concepts of Vedic Sanatan Dharma (VSD) have been extensively discussed in the scriptures. However, its practices vary diversely and are not well defined. Also they are inadequate in terms of bringing the principles into practice in life. Common practices include worshiping the omnipresent God by meditation, recitation of Vedic mantras, performing Yagya or worshiping personified incarnations of God, namely, Rama and Krishna. Worship generally consists of offering devotional prayers to God asking Him for help in terms of removing our grief and miseries and giving us prosperity. Sometimes austerity and penance are also practiced. Lectures, sermons and discussions on the Dharma are almost always devotional, emphasizing the principles. These practices often pay very little attention to children, resulting in poor discipline, social skills, punctuality, leadership, and commitment in them. These values are basic for a free healthy society. They are difficult to instill in adults than in children. An organization is a back bone to develop and implement religious practices and educational programs. Therefore, an attempt is made in this article to explore the reasons of why historically there is a lack of a central organization in VSD, which would develop programs for religious education and practices. Some ways to improve the present situation is also suggested here.

1. VSD is a philosophy and not a religion

Historically, VSD has never been an organized religion, only a philosophy of life. Philosophers were free to write commentaries, often controversial. Since principles of VSD developed at the time when there were no threats of attack by other religious groups (because none existed at that time). Therefore, probably no strong need was recognized to develop a central organization for protection from organized attacks by foreign religious groups, unlike what we face today. Other reasons for the lack of organization may be the belief that whenever Dharma was in danger, God would incarnate on the earth to save VSD from extinction. The other strong belief was that truth always prevails (Satyameva jayate). This implied that truth would automatically win, even without hard work or a struggle of any kind. As a matter of fact a central organization had often been considered an evil and contrary to VSD beliefs. Other religions like Christianity

and Islam have stronger organizational structures because when they were founded, they faced opposition from various existing groups and they had to fight to survive.

2. No need to organize because no need to spread VSD

A need to organize VSD had never been felt because VSD followers never believed in aggressively spreading their Dharma and converting other people. They believed that others would come to them and learn VSD because it contained the truth. They did not recognize the fact that they needed to practice and spread it around the world. VSD was never organized and had no resources to go out to convince the world. VSD believed in global peace, happiness, respect for all religions, self realization, meditation and self purification. VSD did spread in many countries because people from those countries in fact came to India and learned the philosophy. There is plenty of evidence to show that Jesus Christ came to India and spent 18 years learning VSD and philosophy of Buddha. Unfortunately, major organized religious groups believed and behaved differently. They believed in actively converting people to their faith by all means possible, including killing innocent defenseless people sometimes. So they needed to be organized.

3. Influence of caste system on need to organize

VSD society gradually transformed into four castes, namely, Brahman, Kshatriya (Warrior), Vaishya (Businessman) and Shudra (Labor). This development appears to be a single cause in downfall of VSD society. The caste system not only interfered in forming a central organization but also was a major cause of VSD society losing political control of their country. Other castes would simply watch the warrior caste fight and win or loose wars. Since the warrior caste was less than one fourth of the total population, it gave its adversaries a numerical advantage in every conflict. People even learned to say, "Since I am not going to be the king, it does not matter who wins the war and becomes the king" (a famous line by Manthara advising Kaikeyi in the Rama-Charita-Manasa). Two most quoted incidents in this regard are the raid by Mahmud of Ghazani on Somnath temple in

Gujarat in 1024 AD and the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan by Muhammad Gauri in 1192 AD. Public watched Ghazani go all the way across India without being challenged. Our warriors were told by the pundits of the temple that they did not need to stop Ghazni because Lord Shiva would stop the attack any way. This belief led to destruction of the temple and loss of thousands of lives, in addition to the loss of tons of gold and silver and destruction of Shiva's idol. Prithvi Raj Chauhan defeated Muhammad Gauri fourteen times and forgave him each time, because he followed the rules of war of the Vedic Dharma, which prescribes that if after defeat an enemy asks for forgiveness, it should be granted. Finally, Prithvi Raj lost in the fifteenth attack (1192 AD). Since Islam does not forgive an enemy, Prithviraj was killed by Muhammad Gauri. Unfortunately the VSD rules have not changed over the last thousand years, even after a tremendous amount of killing and torture by Muslims during the Mogul rule in India. This culminated in partition of India in 1947, losing one third of the territory. "Never again" ought to be the slogan of VSD, like that adopted by Jewish people after the holocaust during the World War II. The division of India in 1947 now appears to be a blessing in disguise because the followers of VSD would have lost political control of India in democratic elections due to demographics.

4. Failure of Brahmans to organize

Historically, Brahmans had been responsible for developing and interpreting VSD principles, duties, rules of conduct and advising the kings. Brahmans did not do their duty well to interpret the rules of the Dharma, to meet new realities, to preach according to the changing time, and to prepare themselves and the society to face the dangers. Every pundit was interpreting VSD principles in his own way. There was no central body to approve or disapprove the interpretations of the scriptures leading to controversies and no clear directions to follow.

5. Need to organize VSD and start a uniform religious education

There is a need for Brahmans to rise and accept the challenge of organizing VSD, setting up one umbrella organization in the world to interpret VSD values and concepts, and preach established codes of conduct to the followers. They need to lead and unite the fragmented VSD society. Currently anybody can wear a monk's

saffron robe, read a few sacred books and preach in temples as a Pujari. This must stop. A few suggestions are given below to help organize VSD followers:

1. Develop a single umbrella organization, preferably an elected body, for all VSD followers. This organization should make basic policy decisions, official interpretations of the scriptures, develop VSD training curricula for schools and prescribe necessary qualifications and course work for preachers.

2. All temples in every locality need to have an organizational committee both at the district and town level. These committees should be formally associated with the central umbrella organization so that temples can help each other and preach the established VSD interpretations uniformly.

3. All temples should have religious education classes starting from kindergarten to high school, taught by qualified teachers. Devotion to God, self-discipline and volunteerism should be the three most important elements of a religious education program. Other elements may be self preservation, value of commitment, leadership, a team spirit, responding generously to social and religious causes, music, dance and history of VSD. It is easier to learn these values as a child than as an adult.

4. All temples should have standing committees for social justice programs to fight discrimination, help poor and sick, participate in legislation at the state and national levels, and provide help to less fortunate people and to victims of natural disasters.

5. Every temple should have a procedure or a yearly campaign for financial support from regular voting members of the temple, in addition to daily donation during Arati by worshipers.

In summary, VSD followers need to develop well organized temples with work projects to practice the VSD principles so that children can learn all the necessary skills and talents to be competitive in this day and age. There is also a need for a central umbrella organization of VSD temples responsible for interpreting VSD principles and concepts and develop educational programs to help unite VSD followers. I hope that Brahman Samaj of North America takes initiative in this direction.

