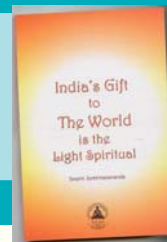


“India’s Gift to the World is the Light Spiritual”



Book Review by **Dr. Mrs. Hilda Raja***

India’s Gift to the World is the Light Spiritual is a well scripted and logical thesis by Swami Jyothirmayananda. It can be broadly divided into four parts:

- 1) Swami Jyothirmayanada presents us with a rich spread of the hoary and glorious heritage of India’s Vedantic wisdom and India’s intellectual traditions-the impact these have globally.
- 2) The crying need of the Day to not only retain these but to put these into practice to make the world a better place.
- 3) Towards this the author makes a passionate call for Unity—a Unified Force and a Unified Leadership education and re-education on the relevance of Hindu Dharma.
- 4) To achieve this Hindus need to be better informed of Indian culture, relevance of Hindu Dharma and the need of Mandir worship—The place of the mandirs in sustaining Dharma its

role and the role the religious institutions are also highlighted.

Swami Jyothirmayananda rightly cautions us on the war that is waged against the Hindu Dharma by the media. It is apt that he substantiates by profusely quoting Swami Vivekananda—his Dream and his call for Unity—making his thesis not just a presentation but a mini-library with all the references for further research. As a true son of Swami Vivekananda he has profusely defended every aspect of his script by quoting this Great monk. He quotes from Swami Dayananda Saraswati reveal a soulfully imbibed with the spirit and the teaching of the way of life which he has opted for.

The reading of this book is a must for it covers crucial areas which today stand out as challenges to every Hindu. In a succinctly way Swami Jyothirmayananda has succeeded in capturing the richness of Sanantana Dharma and exposes it as the only path to peace and harmony. Its salvic

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— Jyotirmayananda

and redemptive substance makes it all powerful and a 'marga' which needs be accepted and adhered to. For those who are new to this ideology and philosophy it is an effective learning—for those who are already full conversant with it recapitulates and furthers injects an urgency to effectively put it in practice. For those who are fence sitters this book should incite their curiosity to look into the legacy and the richness of this country and its ancients—To all then this book is an invitation to take up that torch keep it ever lit and pass on that light to others....

At the outset I must confess that I am ill-equipped to be do full justice to Swami Jyothirmayananda's labour because I do not even have a working knowledge of Sanskrit which is essential for doing justice to a book which focus on Sanatana Dharma. That has not prevented me from reading through the book. I am immensely grateful for this opportunity because I was able to remove some of my misconceptions and gained knowledge. I would strongly recommend this book for those like me at the doorstep of this great centric value which guides life—Sanatana Dharma for those who have the knowledge but has not fully utilized its power, and for those who are passive to energize them. It has a direct appeal and awakens the Indianness within!

History of a people and their country is linked from the prehistoric time to the present and proceeds to the future. It is this which makes the book relevant because one should know of the past to understand the present and take the present to its spiritual future. The relevance lies then in this task. India did not stand in isolation—but this wisdom of it had its impact globally and

continues to send its vibrations across the world. Rightly the author has traced all the braches of spiritual exploration including Dwaita, Vishistadvaita, Advaita, Yoga etc which are not contradictory but complementary paths that integrate themselves resulting in the Vedantic vision of Reality. This complementary nature the author effectively brings by quoting the words of Sri Hanuman in Valmiki Ramayana "when Rama asks Sri Hanuman about his true nature the latter replies 'when I identify myself with the body, O Lord, I am Your humble servant (Dwaita perspective). When I identify myself with the individuality I am part of You (close to the Vishistadvaita perspective) and when I identify myself with the Atman (the indwelling divinity) I am Yourself(Advaita perspective)". This is an unique exploration from the innermost recess to the sublime. It links the prehistoric man's search for the Reality which leads on to today and out reaches to the tomorrow. This is what makes Vedantic Vision of cosmic Reality because it takes into its continuum both man and nature and gives a totality whole. It also reveals how the Indian soul was attuned to seeking the Ultimate—the discovery that man is not a separate entity but a unit of all that was and is and will be. Within the cosmic reality –in the crucible lies both the fire and the heat—the heat cannot be separated from the fire. No religion is so all embracing. India's spiritual message to the world is the attainment of true happiness which can be reached not through greed, self-aggrandizement but in a holistic development based on need and not greed. The rishis have propounded this "that 'jiva' (man) must not end up as 'shava'(corpse), but evolve as he has the

potential to become 'Shiva', the Universal man."

There is misconception that Hinduism is not progressive and modern. The quest for Truth was not restricted to mere meditation but oriented to the explorations and scientific enquiry into the universe thus emerged the tharkashastra. The intellectual basis of India's heritage continues. The quest for truth and the spirit of free enquiry gave India an intellectual sharpness. This stands in contrast with the Abrahamic religions with its monolithic structures and dogmas stifles—nay bans the freedom of enquiry. One leads to the other—where there is freedom there is greater knowledge and where there is greater knowledge there is greater prosperity. Little wonder that India attracted people from all over the world. A. L. Basham's description of this land in "The wonder that was India" unfolds the tapestry with its beautiful colors and patterns—that was India. The rights of the people and their protection were coded in the Arthasashtra. No country in world can boast of a heritage where the rights of the people were safeguarded and coded at a time when slavery existed. Yet the world thinks and even educated Indians think that civilization came from outside—that law was brought with the British and that India was steeped in ignorance.

It is almost staggering to find that there was an undying and unending quest for Truth. This marked with the spirit of free Enquiry etches the refined contours of India's culture. What is fascinating is how the aim of intellectual knowledge in India expanded in ever widening circle like ripples. The need to penetrate ignorance and enlighten

all the aspects of living seems to be the pursuit India's ancients were engaged in.

I was curious with Dr Siu's differentiation between ignorance and no-knowledge. 'Having-no' knowledge is an ignorance and having 'no-knowledge' is one of ultimate enlightenment. I am still not able to comprehend this! With such a refined culture, a rich heritage of both knowledge and spirituality it is the obligation of India to pass the beacon. This cannot be done unless the present generation of Indians irrespective of religious affiliations becomes aware of India's spiritual heritage. It is saddening that even education had completely overlooked this aspect. India's spirituality is intertwined with its quest into all fields of science—astrology, astronomy, psychology, fine arts, banking system, irrigation systems etc. There is a misconception when one talks of India's spirituality to think of Hinduism as antiquated and outdated. This has led to political and social misunderstandings. The inclusive pluralism and holistic Catholicism to which the Hindus and Hindu religion is wedded must be expounded. It is this which makes the Hindu soul secular and it is this which accommodated all religions of the world in India.

When the politicians today talk of secularism and think that the Hindu religion is not secular they only betray their ignorance. It is totally unjust to fault the Hindu religion and distort its very secular basis.

The need then is to revive this quest for learning—to provoke intellectual curiosity as the two fold objectives—one cannot give what one does not have. So unless the

present generation of Hindus, be they in India and or in other lands learn what Sanatana Dharma is all about, they cannot realize that they are the inheritors of a rich spiritual and social heritage. They are then obliged to hand this over to the future generations. To learn the past is vital for the present and essential for the future.

This is aptly echoed in the author's poignant 'Crying need of the Hour'. Hinduism is inclusive pluralism in opposition to the prophetic exclusivists' faiths. In today's context it is imperative to take stock of the coercive and proselytization of the Christians and the Muslims. Right from the entry of these two religions in India through the invaders/traders it has been through compulsion, coercion and force that these religions make converts. The persecution of the Hindus, the levy of a special tax (ziziya) on those who were not of the Islam faith—the destruction of thousands of temples, the devaluation of Hindu norms, rites the ridicule to which they were exposed went unabated down the centuries. Hindu dharma and the ancient rich civilization of ours was totally buried and forgotten because it did not find a place in education. There are various reasons for this. The new generation of Hindus grew with little or no knowledge of Hinduism and its spirituality. This is relevant not only for those in the USA but also for those in India. English education, English media negated all that Sanatana Dharma stood for.

The grave danger Hinduism faces today is from within the country. With political support and international lobbies the Minority religions are spreading fast. This has its own ramification on the whole concept of India as a nation. Hindus need

to become aware of the dangers they face—the country faces and must rise as a Unified Force. This Force can become powerful if only it is equipped well and has clarity of its ideology; an understanding that the past, the present and the future are linked, for Sanatana has no beginning, or end.

To counter the forces against Hinduism Hindus must understand the strength and weakness of the forces they have to face. While Christians have scholars who are well versed in Hindu scriptures and can hold forth, one wonders if Hindu religious leaders are well versed in the Christian scriptures and in its theology. Another aspect towards this Unified Force is becoming staunch Hindus. We have staunch Christians—staunch Muslims but rarely do we come across staunch Hindus. This is not to be mistaken for fanaticism. Hindus take their religion and religious rites lightly. According to convenience they go to the temples or never go. One cannot say that he/she is a good Hindu but one can say that he/she is a good Christian. This in a way does not make others respect the Hindus. They find the Hindus themselves take their religion so lightly. This has to change.

Yet another disturbing fact is that the Hindu priests/purohiths are not respected. While they perform the rites the assembly of Hindus indulges in chit chatting and is so distracted. Take for example a house warming /or naming ceremony. The family and the relatives all use the occasion to update information—and gossip while the poor priest is chanting the prayers. The first question the Hindus should ask themselves is, 'What does Hindu religion mean to them? The answer to this then is essential—

to structure a Unified Force, and a Unified Leadership.

“Be thou all of one mind, be thou all of one thought” (Rig Veda,10.191.1-4), “Being of one mind is the secret of Society”, “Secret of Power lies in Unity and organization”, said the great Hindu monk of India—Swami Vivekananda. To achieve this Unity and to heed that clarion call the Hindus need to be better informed of Indian culture, the relevance of Hindu Dharma, the need for Mandir worship.

Though the call to be better informed of Indian culture is directed by Swami Jyothirmananda to the Indian Americans in this book I think it is equally valid to the Indians in this country irrespective of religion. The difficulty comes when the non-Hindu Indians associate everything to a strict sphere of Hindu religion and discards it. It must be clearly understood that Hindu culture and Hindu religion are intertwined and when properly studied and understood there would be greater appreciation and respect for it. For what was inherent in this country—the people of the Sindhu region—what was their way of life—what motivated them—what were their aspirations and what was their god orientation—what were their norms etc cannot be put in separate compartments. Culture encompasses everything that transpires within the human activity both interpersonal and community wise. At the same time Hindu religion is Sanatana Dharma which guides the life and life style of people. We thus say Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life and this is correct. This is the legacy and the heritage of all Indians. Its relevance to the world can be gauged only if we are able to understand

what this great heritage and legacy is all about.

It is the spirit of enquiry, the acceptance of different opinions, the underlying principle of equality, and the unwavering and untiring quest for the Eternal Truth. This is what engaged our ancients. There is democracy, there is a scientific temper, there is humanism and there is a spirituality which guides the materialism. Can there be a greater compendium of subjects, of values, of directives, of motivation in the world other than what is encapsulated in Sanatana Dharma? The collective expression of a people guided by this Sanatana Dharma is the congregating in the Mandirs. The mandirs/temples play a role in concretizing the people as a whole. Apart from the scientific layout of the temple—the science involved in its architecture, the energy the murthi of a Deity does emanate a power. The psychological impact on the devotee, who goes to the mandir and seeks blessings from that personified aspect of Brahman, not only heals the soul but invigorates the whole body. This from my own experience I can assert from going to a church—but enter a temple it sucks you in—it almost makes you one with the whole—a kind of a comfort feeling of belongingness giving a warmth. The thronging crowd becomes strength—‘these are my people...who for generations kept alive a heritage—a god—longingness and were always attuned to the Ultimate Spirit’. Towards that Spirit then all move. In a world so troubled and beset with materialism one suddenly discovers the maya and the reality.

The mandir can become a rally place—a point where learning must take place. The present situation must change and the

mandirs need to reach out not only to the Hindus but to all. The openness to all—the readiness to impart basic scriptures and its meanings, the explanation of worship—both the saguna and the nirguna forms—the need to have scholars and learned persons available for counseling and for spiritual advise are areas that need to be filled. For the seeking of the Eternal Sprit is not separated from the other aspects of development of the whole personality. Somehow this is lacking in the present day mandirs and its managements. The parroting automating of mantras must be replaced by slow well articulated recitation with devotion. For all this the priests must be well trained. In the Catholic Church it takes minimum 7 years and for the Jesuits it is 12 years of training to be ordained priests. The mandir is central to the faith expression according to Sri Ramakrishna, “Know that there must be manifestation of God in places where countless people have practiced austerity. From time immemorial, numerous devotees and men of realization have come to these holy places to have a vision of God. Therefore, God though equally present everywhere, manifests in temples in the same way as water, though can be found anywhere by digging the ground, it is certain one can find water more easily at the site of a tank or a lake.”

I was also enlightened by the word ‘Ishvara’ than God. A word which knocked at memories door which is uttered when the soul seeks solace or cries out in pain, joy, astonishment is ‘Ishvara’. That God has no image, but in my childhood I was taught that all are created in the image of God. But then God has no image is not been questioned. Such a distortion is instilled into tiny tots’ minds. Logic is simple and yet

how unquestioningly we allow being misled. It is some years since I have shed the concept of such a god who stands outside me and the creation story.

Another gem of knowledge which I discovered is that ‘Hindus do not believe that there is only one God, Hindus believe that God is one, a unity of all, inclusive of all things, manifest and unmanifest...for God is unit, not a unity’. The freedom to perceive God in whatever form one chooses is a redemptive feature of Sanatana Dharma. Is not God everything—is not God the Omega and the Alfa? Is not God omnipresent in everything? He/she is not outside me but within me. This is empowerment. This was not only enriching but an insight which makes me see the world, its events, people and the struggles in one cosmic reality—God.

It is inexplicable how such a rich heritage of Hindu dharma did not find a place in our education curriculum. A civilization which was not only Spiritual but which gave to the world from the Zero—the decimal system to the sciences like chemistry, antonomy, medicine, surgical know-how. Here was a civilization with spirituality at the core but with sciences of all branches developing in harmony. This rational spiritual of Sanatana dharma gave greater vision of life and an impetus towards a well balanced growth of the family, society, nation and the world. The majority of the Indians are unaware of this rich mine of theirs. The Vedic concept of, ‘may all be safe in the world’ speaks volumes of a philosophy that reaches to all and wishes all safety and peace. In a world with so much of violence and brutality, when man is against man—nation against

nation, this stands out as a beacon beckoning all nations to be knit as a family in brotherhood.

Sanatana Dharma seeks unity in diversity, non-violence, inner peace and tranquility of the mind, respect for womanhood, preservation of the environment and ecology—these are the same concerns which obviously elude the world bodies and national governments which spend billions towards these issues. Successful attainment of these will be based on the acceptance of the path of life—individually, nationally and Globally—the path of Sanatana Dharma.

A mischievous propaganda has been unleashed against this Hindu philosophy by accusing it of caste system and its oppression. It is true that there was caste system—be it to regulate society—or to organize it on the basis of occupation. Yet the caste system was no doubt used by some for exploitation it was more an aberration than the general rule of living. But the caste system was not an inevitable part of the Sanatana Dharma. There are great saints who emerged from different strata of society and are worshipped by all. It is important to name some of them: Namdev a tailor, Sadna was a butcher, Kabir a weaver, Ravidas a cobbler, Sena a barber, Nabha a pariah, and Dadu a cotton-ginning. These worked for social reforms and are revered. But it cannot be denied that the caste system did segment society in water tight compartments. These saints worked towards reforming such a society. But what is not accepted is the fact that today in this modern age, with all the 'secular' education, the politicians and the people by and large uphold caste and seem to perpetuate it for vested interest. So the

'secularists' cannot blame the Hindu philosophy or the ideology for the evils of caste system that prevail today. The situation has been worsened by the secular forces.

Reading through the 'India's Gift to the World is the Light Spiritual' has reinforced with me this—the Hindus and the Hindu leaders—both political and religious, must proclaim from the housetops that 'Hinduism, Hindutva and Hindu Nationalism are identical and that every Hindu must necessarily be a patriot first and last'. It is imperative to educate the masses at large that Hindutva is not a communal concept—that it is not a narrow religious outlook but a patriotic nationalism, of unity of all Indians. This calls for equality to all—and a pluralism which embraces all religions. This cannot and should not be branded as communal. Then it is as though truth is branded as Evil and the perception so warped as to state that white is black and black is white. Too long this has been mildly taken and such false propaganda and propagandists have been allowed to rue the day. It must be fiercely opposed and a very aggressively media put in place to demolish this falsehood and uphold Sanatana Dharma—The struggle is on...with greater vigor, conviction insights and purpose, for Ishvara is within me and outside me—this is what I fervently wish all readers of this book, for that's the "India's Gift to the World is the Light Spiritual."

— Dr Mrs Hilda Raja, Vadodara.