



Sanatan Dharma: A Teaching Of Universal Order

Riya Singh (M.A English)

India

Abstract:

A belief which stands on the doctrine of universal order, a sect of people determining salvation and unity with the supreme one as the ultimate goal of life, a philosophy which deals with not only religious principles but also with philosophy of life is Sanatan Dharma, westernized by the word Hinduism. Dealing not only with morally correct way of living, it encompasses as the code of law which governs humanity. This paper depicts why Sanatan Dharma is considered eternal and how it teaches to live one's life.

Keywords:

Karma, Dharma, Moksha, Eternal, Brahma, Karuna, Ahimsa, Satya, Shanti, Dana, Austerity, Hindu, Cosmology, Sanatan Dharma, Aatma, Reincarnation

Introduction:

Sanatan Dharma meaning "the eternal way" encapsulates time and space, spreading its boundaries farther from mortal knowledge. It is a belief which transcends devotion and connects the soul of a being with the utmost power – the Omnipresent. Being rooted in the Vedic traditions, it emphasizes the cyclic nature of existence, where the universe undergoes infinite cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution, governed by the laws of Karma and Dharma. Humans according to the eternal law are in search of liberation (Moksha), by breaking these shackles of life forms. Despite being followed by millions of devotees, Sanatan Dharma does not own an origin, hence having no definite foundation and being timeless. Teaching how to live a virtuous and a morally correct life is a profound element in Sanatan. These teachings emphasize virtues like truth, patience, asceticism, purity, goodwill, mercy, forbearance, righteousness, compassion, and non-violence, Karma (the law of cause and effect), Dharma (righteous duty) all of which are seen as eternal values that transcend time and cultural boundaries, therefore remaining relevant and vibrant through ages. Sanatan absorbs and integrates diverse beliefs, practices, and philosophies, which allows it to remain relevant in different eras, contributing to its flexible and enduring nature.

"Do not do to another what you do not like to be done to yourself; that is the gist of the law- all other laws are variable"

-Mahabharata 5.39

The word Dharma in the phrase Sanatan Dharma is different from religion. Dharma guidelines the actions by certain rules; Sanatan Dharma is a rulebook which is valid since eternity. The concept of “Brahma” which refers to formless God, ultimate reality and the omnipresent energy present in the universe, who take various forms and incarnation for the welfare of the people not only enriches the basis of continuing energy roaming in the cosmos but also focusses our soul into its realm. Why is this belief continuing for so long? What powers it? Sanatan Dharma stands on the survival pedestal because of its adaptive nature that has never been static. In one of its sacred texts naming ‘Atharva Veda’, the explanation of the word Sanatan is “they proclaim him to be eternal. But he may become new again even today”. Followers of Sanatan show a certain unity in respect because Hindu philosophy is flexible and it accepts all views. There is a belief that the ways may be different but the destination is the same for all. Sanatan accepts other religions as true; there is no concept that religions of other faiths cannot be a way of reaching God. This tolerance along with no forced conversions makes Sanatan a respectable and unity bound belief. No one can find a war in history of this faith against other religions in the name of religion superiority; they proclaim “Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam” and “Sarve Bhavan Tu Sukhinah” as their motto, which acknowledge the whole world as one home, moving towards prosperity. This form of unity is imbibed in Hindu followers as a duty and a means of following their own path. They place an emphasis on Sanatan Dharma as this helps them to focus on their own spiritual journey and also their own aims which constitute major ones that are essential for human lives.

“It is far better to discharge one’s prescribed duties, even though faultily, than another’s duties perfectly. Destruction in the course of performing one’s own duty is better than engaging in another’s duties, for to follow another’s path is dangerous”.

-Bhagavad Gita 3.35

People of this eternal belief accepts an inevitable aspect of human life i.e. suffering, and they know that it is part of the world we live in and therefore acceptance allows them to move forward. Suffering can be tormenting to hold and it can be physical and mental in nature. According to majority of Hindu believers suffering is mainly of materialistic aspect, which grips the neck of human life with specific material things, hindering the liberation desired by the individual. Extremity is perilous and human life vulnerable, thus Hindus attempt to overcome their attachment and this can be achieved only by removing oneself from the obsession.

Ahimsa, another virtue taught by Sanatan Dharma embodies the principle of non-violence and respect for all living beings. Due to the fact that it is an eternal virtue, there is a transcending thought of not only refraining to commit physical harm but following non-violence in thoughts, words and action. This principle indicates that every life is sacred and is a part of the Omnipresent and thus, one should act with compassion and avoid causing pain or suffering to others. Practicing ahimsa fosters love, kindness, and empathy, contributing to personal growth and also to the well-being of society. It is not just a passive state but an active commitment to

peace, requiring courage and mindfulness in daily interactions. Sanatan runs on the track of good karma and doing good will do the individual good is an affirmed belief surrounding it.

Satya or truthfulness emphasises the importance of honesty in human life not only limiting to words but also including actions and thoughts. It is the practice of being true to oneself and others, upholding integrity in all aspects of life. Satya is more than just avoiding lies; it involves living authentically and aligning one’s actions with the truth. By adhering to satya, individuals cultivate trust, transparency, and moral strength, contributing to the greater good and harmony in society. The pursuit of truth is seen as essential for spiritual growth, leading one closer to self-realization and the divine. Moreover, truth is inevitable and an eternal virtue which surrounds every creation on this planet and also the cosmos.

Meaning: *"There is no Dharma higher than truth."*

-Mahabharata, 8.58.

Karuna defined as compassion is a central virtue which direct towards morally controlled and humanistic lifestyle that calls for empathy and kindness towards all living beings. It is more than a deep, unconditional love and concern for the suffering of others; it prompts an individual to feel and share the suffering along with acting to alleviate their pain. Karuna is more than just an emotion; it is an active participation for helping others, driven by a sense of shared humanity and interconnectedness. Practicing karuna encourages selflessness, humility, and a sense of responsibility towards others, fostering a more harmonious and compassionate society. It is through compassion that one can transcend personal ego and contribute to the collective well-being, embodying the spirit of love and mercy that is in the heart of humanity.

Another fundamental virtue of Sanatan is Shanti, meaning peace that signifies inner tranquility and harmony which elongates to surroundings. It represents a state of calmness and serenity, free from conflict and disturbance, both within oneself and in relationships with others. Shanti is not just the absence of violence or chaos, but a positive state of mind that cultivates patience, forgiveness, and understanding. By seeking peace, individuals aim to maintain balance and composure in the face of life's challenges, promoting a peaceful coexistence in society. In Hindu practices, shanti is often invoked through yoga, prayers and mantras, symbolizing the deep thought for peace in all realms of existence—personal, communal, and universal.

Dana or generosity propounds the act of giving selflessly to others without expecting anything in return. It is rooted in the belief of sharing which includes one's wealth, knowledge, or resources in a way to cultivate humility and compassion while reducing attachment to material possessions which invokes suffering and obsession. Dana is considered a sacred duty, reflecting the interconnectedness of all beings and the responsibility to support and uplift others. This virtue extends beyond charity, emphasizing the spirit in which the act is performed— with sincerity, respect, and a pure heart. Practicing generosity contributes to spiritual growth and the well-being

of society, fostering a sense of community and mutual care which is much needed in the present time.

"Anadanam sada kuryāt tadannam akshayam bhavet"

Meaning: *"One should always give food in charity, for such food never diminishes."*

-Mahabharata, 13.11

Austerity or self-discipline is another virtue taught by Sanatan that involves the practice of rigorous self-control and asceticism to achieve spiritual growth and self-realization. It signifies the inner strength and dedication required to overcome physical and mental challenges, undertaking a disciplined lifestyle to attain higher consciousness. Following self-discipline, individuals cultivate resilience, focus, and purity of mind, which are essential for transcending worldly distractions and achieving a deeper connection with the divine. This practice fosters personal transformation and aligns one's actions with higher spiritual goals, contributing to both individual enlightenment and overall harmony.

"Tapasvīm śīlavatām dharmam yati yena bhavam tathā"

Meaning: *"One who is a practitioner of tapas, and possesses good character, achieves the highest state of dharma."*

-Mahabharata 12.18

Sanatan stands on the principle of karma which refers to the ethical cause and effect rule of destiny, where every action, thought or word—whether good or bad—creates a chain of effects that will manifest in the present or future life. The concept of karma underscores that individuals are responsible for their actions and their outcomes. Good deeds lead to positive outcomes and advancement, while harmful actions result in negative consequences. This accumulation of karma influences one's current life and future rebirths, perpetuating the cycle of samsara (reincarnation). The goal is to cultivate good karma through righteous living, fulfilling one's dharma (moral duties), and ultimately achieving moksha (liberation) from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

"Yathā kravyād yathā paśyati sasyagandhi karmaṇām |
Tathā karmaṇā tattvena sadharmam nānyat phalam ||"

Meaning: *Just as the seed is sown and yields a crop according to its nature, so does the action produce results according to its own nature.*

-Mahabharata 12.8

There is no foundation or origin point in Sanatan Dharma as a result there is no specific definition of the belief. According to Supreme Court of India,

"Unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophy concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more". Sanatan includes plurality of religious phenomena of India, it does not have any systematically associated norms or commandments but it does teach an individual how to sustain living and to rest in peace.

Another aspect of Sanatan being eternal is it emphasizes on worshipping nature which is present even before the birth of humanity. Nature worshipping is considered sacred in Hindu culture, which includes not only plants but animals and water bodies. Human kind is cared by nature in every aspect and our reverence towards it is essential, hence, Sanatan which infuses compassion and care in every individual following its order consider nature as a mother. The lack of moral education and taken for granted mind-set has corrupted the humanity which now bestow monstrous destruction upon nature, seeking their own doom.

"And in consequence of the littleness of their knowledge, they will have no wisdom. And for this, covetousness and avarice will overwhelm them all. And wedded to avarice and wrath and ignorance and lust men will entertain animosities towards one another, desiring to take one another's lives"

-Mahabharata: Vana Parva 189

In Hindu cosmology, the idea of multiverse, or "lokas," has long been embedded in its sacred texts and philosophical teachings. These lokas are considered different planes of existence, each with its own laws and beings, overseen by various deities. The concept of Brahma, the ultimate reality in Sanatan, transcends these multiple universes, existing as the eternal, infinite source of energy of all creation. The cyclical nature of life, with its endless cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution, further supports the possibility of a multiverse happening in cosmos. Each universe is part of a vast cosmic system, interconnected yet distinct, reflecting the boundless diversity of the divine. One of the verses that directs at the concept of multiple worlds in Hindu texts is from the *Rigveda*, one of the oldest sacred texts in Sanatan Dharma,

"Om asya vāmiyaṃ prapadyaṃ tā jānim uditāṃ vaiśvadevyāṃ varuṇīm bhāratam."

Meaning: *"There are infinite worlds beyond this world; the earth is one among millions of such worlds."*

-Rigveda 1.22.20

In Hindu philosophy, Aatma (soul) is eternal and this teaching of soul which eventually will unite in the Omnipresent sheds light on the eternal aspect of this culture. Aatma is the true self, an indivisible and immortal essence that exists beyond the physical body and mind. This soul is eternal, unchanging, and inherently divine, reflecting the ultimate reality, or Brahma, which is the infinite, formless, and absolute principle underlying all existence. The belief in the soul as eternal is foundational to Sanatan. It teaches that while the physical body is temporary and subject to birth, decay, and death, the soul transcends these limitations. After death, the soul does not perish; instead, it continues its journey through the cycle of samsara—the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This cycle is as mentioned governed by the law of karma, where the actions of one life influence the conditions of the next.

This belief in the eternal nature of the soul describes as Sanatan Dharma, the "eternal way." The philosophy teaches that the truths it embodies—such as the immortality of the soul, the existence of an Omnipotent energy in the universe, and the pursuit of liberation—are not bound by time, culture, or geography. These truths are seen as universal and timeless, relevant to all beings across all eras.

*"na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre"*

Meaning: *"The soul is neither born, nor does it die; it has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting, and ancient; it is not slain when the body is slain."*

-Bhagavad Gita 2:20

In this context, Sanatan is considered eternal not only because it has timeless philosophies and a rich tradition but also because it is grounded in the belief that the soul's journey and the spiritual principles guiding that journey are everlasting. The eternal soul, with its continuous quest for liberation and unity with the divine, mirrors the eternal nature of this belief itself, making it a living tradition that transcends time and space.

In recent times the moral education on Dharma or one's righteous duty is ignored, humans are being an easy prey of wrath, corruption, and compassion is a long forgotten word which can lead to a range of negative effects on both individual and societal levels. On a personal level, ignoring dharma can result in internal conflict, guilt, and a sense of purposelessness, as one strays from the path of moral and spiritual integrity. This misalignment with one's true nature often leads to the accumulation of negative karma, which, according to Hindu belief, can cause suffering in this life and adverse consequences in future lives. On a broader scale, when individuals collectively disregard their dharma, it can lead to societal decay, where chaos, injustice, and immorality prevail. This erosion of ethical values disrupts the natural order and harmony of the universe, leading to widespread suffering and instability. Ultimately, not adhering to dharma creates a ripple effect of negativity, weakening the foundation of both personal and communal well-being.

*"yaḥ śhāstra-vidhim utsriya vartate kāma-kārataḥ /
na sa siddhim avāpnoti na sukhaṁ na parāṁ gatim ॥"*

Meaning: *"He who discards the scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination."*

-Bhagavad Gita 16:23

Conclusion:

Sanatan Dharma, or the "eternal way," serves as a timeless guide to living a life of purpose, balance, and spiritual fulfillment. Its teachings are rooted in ancient wisdom, encapsulated in sacred texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, which offer profound insights into the nature of existence and the human soul. Central to Hindu philosophy is the belief in the eternal soul which transcends the physical body and continues its journey through the cycle of samsara—the endless process of birth, death, and rebirth. This journey is shaped by the law of karma, where one's actions in this life influence future lives, underscoring the importance of living with moral integrity and responsibility.

This belief encourages adherence to dharma, the righteous path, which is Sanatan (eternal) according to one's role in society, stage of life, and circumstances. By following dharma, individuals contribute to the harmony of the universe and progress on their spiritual path. The ultimate goal, however, is to attain moksha, or liberation, where the soul realizes its oneness with the ultimate reality, Brahma, and is freed from the cycle of reincarnation.

This eternal way teaches not just religious rituals but offers a comprehensive way of life, guiding individuals to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness, compassion, non-violence, and self-discipline. It promotes a balanced approach to life, integrating material pursuits with spiritual growth, and encourages a deep respect for all living beings and the natural world. Through its enduring principles and adaptable practices, Hinduism continues to provide a framework for living a life that is in harmony with the cosmos, fostering both personal and collective well-being. In essence, it is a path that leads individuals toward self-realization, inner peace, and ultimate liberation, making it a truly eternal way of life.

As an eternal way, Sanatan continues to inspire millions, guiding them towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their connection to the divine, while offering enduring principles that are as relevant today as they were eras before.

Works Cited:

1. BBC. "The Purpose of Life - Hindu Beliefs - Edexcel - GCSE Religious Studies Revision - Edexcel." BBC Bitesize, BBC, 2022,
2. BHATNAGAR, RAKESH. "Hinduism Is a Way of Life: SC." The Times of India, Times Of India, 25 Apr. 2005,
3. D, John. Mahabharata. London, Penguin, 2010.
4. Editors, History.com. "Hinduism." History, A&E Television Networks, 6 Oct. 2017,
5. Grace. Bhagavad-Gita as It Is. The Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust.
6. Kumar, Abhishek. "What Is Hinduism, a Religion or a Way of Life?" Times of India Blog, 23 Jan. 2022.
7. Wendy Doniger O'flaherty. The Rig Veda. Harmondsworth, 1981.
8. Wikipedia Contributors. "Hinduism." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 29 Nov. 2018,

