



## VAISNAVA VEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The article *Vaisnava Vedic Perspective* argues that due to major deviations from basic concepts imbedded in the ancient Vedic culture of *sanatana-dharma* centered on a theistic organization of society, known as *varnasrama dharma*, modernity has been leading humanity on a path of destruction away from the foundational concepts of a peaceful, harmonious, healthy, and prosperous society. By neglecting the four pillars of dharma<sup>i</sup>, namely: 1) *satyam* (truthfulness), 2) *daya* (compassion), 3) *tapah* (discipline) and 4) *saucam* (cleanliness), humanity has been plunged in major deviations since the days of the Industrial Revolution hurling modern civilization in what some claim to be the Holocene extinction also known as the sixth mass extinction. Basic notions of Vedic epistemology and Vedic ontology are fundamental to understand how these deviations have occurred and how they negatively affect present day society. The remedy recommended by the advocates of Vedic Sociology lies in re-introducing the long established and fundamental sciences that deal with the material and spiritual realities of individuals and society, namely: 1) *Anviksiki* (The Science of Philosophy), 2) *Trayi*, the Science of Education, 3) *Danda Niti*, the Science of Politics, and 4) *Varta*, the Science of Economics. These perennial sciences form the basis of both material *sva-dharma* (natural material occupations within *Varnasrama Dharma*) and spiritual *sva-dharma* (natural spiritual activities within *Bhagavat Dharma*).

### 1. Introduction

#### OM SURABHYAI NAMAH! OM SRI GURAVE NAMAH!

To unravel the plight of modern man's current narrative there is a need to present the Vaisnava Vedic perspective of society (Vedic Sociology). In this article, I will address three pressing problems commonly found in most developed and developing countries, with a special focus on India as described in the *Kautilya's Arthashastra*<sup>ii</sup>, namely 1) *Trayi* (the Science of Education), 2) *Danda-Niti* (the Science of Politics), and 3) *Varta* (the Science of Economics), as they negatively affect the cultural, educational, political, and socio-economic conditions and parameters of communities when managed irresponsibly.

The great Statesman of the *Mahabharata*, "Grandfather Bhishmadeva", describes three GIFTS of NATURE to mankind, gifts that should never be sold, never be abused, never misused nor ever exploited, namely 1) cows, 2) land, and 3) knowledge<sup>iii</sup>. These three are considered "Mothers" and can best be understood and appreciated in a society

that values the age-long occupation of natural agriculture and cow care, the basis of a Vedic sustainable economy as described in *Bhagavad-gita, krishi-goraksya-vanijyam*<sup>iv</sup>. The components of these three gifts of nature are reflected in our modern times through the promotion of “intentional communities”, “sustainable development” and “eco villages” as seen in the efforts of Global Eco Network (GEN) aiming at building a regenerative future.

I will argue that modernity has robbed humanity of these three natural gifts of nature, three treasures that epitomize the real wealth of a nation. Going back centuries, and to this present day, agriculture that fosters a lifestyle based on simple living and high thinking has always been accepted as the noblest of all professions. This was echoed by the Founding Father of America, Benjamin Franklin, by the Founding Father of India, M. K. Gandhi in his *Village Swaraj*<sup>v</sup>, by Indian environmental activist Dr. Vandana Shiva in her book *Soil Not Oil*<sup>vi</sup>, by Russian-American sociologist, Pitirim Sorokin, in his book *Man and Society in Calamity*<sup>vii</sup>, by American researcher Michael Cremo, author of *Human Devolution*<sup>viii</sup>, and by philosopher and social thinker, Rajani Kanth, author of *Farewell to Modernism: On Human Devolution in the Twenty-First Century*<sup>ix</sup>.

It is imperative to first clearly understand the basis upon which the Vaisnava Vedic perspective is grounded: 1) by becoming familiar with its Epistemology, 2) by studying its Ontology, 3) by understanding the Vaisnava Vedic Sociology, 4) by knowing and realizing the four standard Vedic sciences (*Catur Vidya*), 5) by looking closely at the Vedic Hierarchy of Human Needs, an interesting resemblance to Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, 6) by understanding the neglect and desecration of human values and lastly 7) by bringing the matter to its proper conclusion.

The principles governing village life in India are essentially the same as those in any country. The readers' challenge will lie in their ability to discern the major conceptual differences I will identify between the Vedic and Western paradigm to Sociology.

### 1.1 Vaisnava Vedic Epistemology

Out of many processes for acquiring knowledge, Vedic philosophers accept three as being most valid: 1) *pratyaksa pramana* or proof through direct sense perception, 2) *anumana pramana* or proof through reason/inference/logic/ hypothesis, and 3) *sabda pramana*, or proof through aural reception from higher authorities.

Since both material perception through the senses (*pratyaksa*) and the mental perception through the mind (*anumana*) are material, these two processes cannot ascertain the spiritual reality claimed by transcendentalists, a reality which is beyond the material realm. Hence, the Vedic philosophers and the scriptures themselves declare that among these three processes, only *sabda pramana* or sound perception from authorized sources is the best and ultimately the preferred one upon which to be relied.

The source of Vedic knowledge are the *Vedas* themselves as they are accepted as *apaurusheya*, independent and faultless, devoid of any mundane origin as explained by the foremost philosopher and mystic Srila Jiva Goswami in his *Sri Tattva-sandarbha*<sup>x</sup>.

The *Itihasas* and *Puranas* are said to be the fifth *Veda*, being both *apaurusheya* in nature and an extension of the original *Vedas*<sup>xi</sup>. Within the *Mahabharata*, we find the *Bhagavad-gita*, the foundational theme of this great epic summarizing the seminal

teachings of the Vedic knowledge. Among the *Puranas*, the *Bhagavat Purana*, also known as *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, is recognized as the *summum bonum* (supreme) of all *Puranas*<sup>xii</sup>. Hence, followers of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya* accept these two Vedic literatures, the *Bhagavad-gita* and the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, as their main source of knowledge and strictly observe the process of *sabda pramana*.

## 2. Vaisnava Vedic Ontology

The fundamental principles that govern Vedic ontology are given in the perennial teachings of the *Bhagavad-gita*, as spoken by Lord Krishna and further elaborated upon in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. The five *tattvas* (truths) introduced in the *Bhagavad-gita* are: 1) *isvara* (controller), 2) *jiva* (the spirit soul), 3) *prakriti* (the material energy), 4) *kala* (the time factor) and 5) *karma* (the law of action and reaction). The first four principles are eternal while the last one is not eternal<sup>xiii</sup>. It is essential to understand these five principles to enter the meaning of the Vaisnava Vedic philosophy, especially as presented in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

### 2.1 *Isvara* (controller)

The first concept, *isvara*, refers both to the supreme *isvara*, God, described in *sastra* (scriptures) as *paramesvara* (supreme controller) and to the living entity, *jiva*, a limited *isvara*, never to attain the level of *paramesvara*. In his *Sri Dashamula Tattvam*, Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur describes *isvara* as *param tattva* (ultimate reality), as *shaktiman* (vested with infinite power) and as *rasa-samudra* (an ocean of *rasa* or sweetness)<sup>xiv</sup>.

In the *Bhagavad-gita* itself, Lord Krishna declares Himself to be the compiler of *Vedanta* and the object to be known in the *Vedas*<sup>xv</sup>.

### 2.2 *Jiva* (spirit soul)

The concept of *jiva* is clearly defined in the *Bhagavad-gita* as being the eternal spiritual part and parcel of God. The *jiva*, being under the influence of the material senses and the mind, is struggling very hard in this material world<sup>xvi</sup>.

### 2.3 *Prakriti* (material nature)

The concept of *prakriti* refers to material nature composed of twenty-four material elements from which various forms are created among the 8,400,000 species of life described in the Vedic literatures. All species of life are made up of five gross material elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether) and three subtle material elements (mind, intelligence, and ego)<sup>xvii</sup>.

### 2.4 *Kala* (time)

*Kala* (time) is the fourth eternal principle. In the material world, it is experienced as past, present, and future but in the spiritual realm, time is eternal. According to *karma*, we take on different material bodies until we no longer remain influenced by the modes of material nature (*gunas*).

### 2.5 *Karma* (activity)

*Karma* (activity), the fifth principle, determines our fate or destiny in this material world. There are three types of *karma* described in the *Bhagavad-gita*: 1) *karma* means following the injunctions of *sastra* and reaping good reactions, 2) *vikarma*, means going against the injunction of *sastra* and reaping bad reactions, 3) *naiskarma* or *akarma*, means

not incurring any good or bad *karmic* reaction, the path known as *bhakti-yoga*, enabling one to get out of the cycle of repeated birth and death<sup>xviii</sup>.

### 3. Vaisnava Vedic Sociology

#### 3.1 Vaisnavism

Vaisnavism refers to those who accept the personal form of God and thus worship Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna. Members of ISKCON are known as *Brahma-Gaudiya-Madhva Vaisnavas*.

Every school has an *Acarya* (Preceptor), a commentary on the primary foundational Vedic text called *Vedanta Sutra* (aphorisms describing the apex of Vedic knowledge) and a particular seminal truth called *tattva*.

The philosophy of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya* is summarized by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the following three levels of knowledge: 1) *sambandha jnana* (knowledge of relationships), 2) *abhidheya jnana* (knowledge of activities) and *prayojana jnana* (knowledge of objectives). These three covers all the different levels of *tattva* (truth).

#### 3.2 Veda

The expressions Vedic knowledge, Vedic teachings, Vedic culture, Vedic villages, etc., are all connected with the word *Veda* which broadly speaking means the original knowledge, according to *Vaisnava* philosophy, revealed to the first created being Lord Brahma<sup>xix</sup>.

Srila Vyasadeva, has summarized the essence of the Vedic knowledge, culminating in the *Vedanta Sutra* of which the *Bhagavat Purana* or *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is the natural commentary, described as ‘*the mature fruit of the desire tree of Vedic literatures*’<sup>xx</sup>.

#### 3.3 Varnasrama Dharma

The organization of society was a fundamental concept and focus of statesmanship governing villages, states, nations, and the entire world. The Vedic science of polity, the domain of *ksatriyas* or Vedic rulers, deals amply with both administration and organization of society.

Vedic social organization is the eternal scientific arrangement of four social orders (*catur varnyam*) and four spiritual orders (*asramas*) referred to as *varnasrama dharma*<sup>xxi</sup>, which is also known as *sanatana dharma*.

### 4. Four Vedic Sciences (Catur Vidya)

The four Vedic sciences of 1) Anviksiki (Philosophy), 2) Trayi (Education), 3) Danda Niti, (Politics), and 4) Varta (Economics) give direction to the social body of *varnasrama dharma*. However, due to the neglect of these four sciences, the Western world has been plunged in a vicious descending spiral of ever-increasing social unrest and moral turpitude.

Although modernity (and all its nomenclatures such as Positivism, Marxism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, etc.) is the root conflicting factor causing major disruption in the very principles of *dharma*, I must also acknowledge that the culprits for India's downtrodden situation are not only from the West. The social discrimination found

within the caste system in India finds its source in the abuse and misuse of brahminical powers and this led to a great debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar centered on the former's "undelivered speech" entitled "*The Annihilation of Caste*"<sup>xxii</sup>. From the Vedic perspective, it can be said that Ambedkar was unaware of basic principles governing the science of both *sanatana dharma* and *varnasrama dharma* and therefore chose to reject the total consummate of Vedic teachings by adopting Buddhism at the end of his life. Deviations from *dharma* are no reasons to reject the principles of *dharma*.

### 5. Vedic Hierarchy of Human Needs

The following chart delineates the three natural levels of the self (*atma*), namely 1) the gross material matter, 2) the subtle material body, and 3) the spirit soul as clearly defined in the *Bhagavad-gita*<sup>xxiii</sup>.

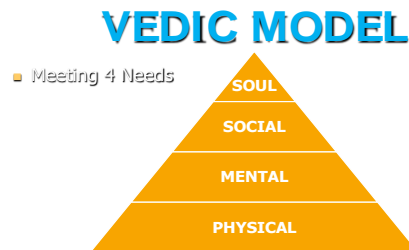
#### Vedic Hierarchy of Human Needs

##### Self-Identity & Self-Needs

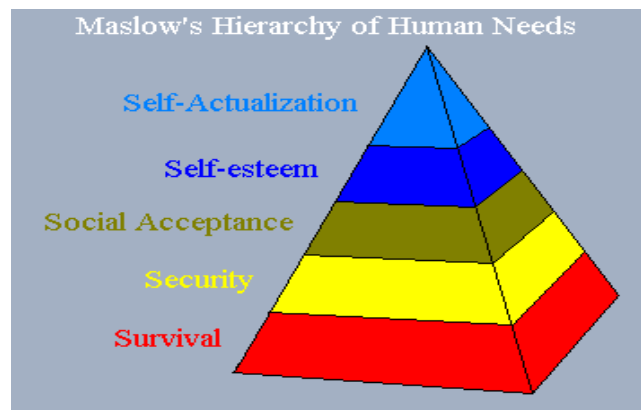
Table 1: Hierarchy of Human Needs

Gross Matter	Subtle Matter	Spiritual/Anti-Matter
Body	Mind	<i>Atma</i> /Consciousness
Five Material Elements	Three Material Elements	One Spiritual Element
Earth Water Fire Air Ether	Mind Intelligence Ego	Spirit Soul/ <i>Atma</i>
Physical Needs	Emotional Needs Cognitive Needs Social Needs	Spiritual Needs
Cow Protection	Brahminical Culture	God Realization
Land Land Cultivation and Cow Protection provides for physical needs.	Leadership  The Varnasrama System provides for emotional, cognitive & social needs.	Love & Devotion Devotional service helps one develop pure love of God, self-realization.
<i>Sambandha</i>	<i>Abhidheya</i>	<i>Prayojana</i>
Knowledge of Identity	Knowledge of activity	Knowledge of goal

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is classified as: 1. Biological and physiological needs, 2. Safety needs, 3. Belongingness and Love needs, 4. Esteem needs, and 5. Self-actualization needs. We can compare the two models.

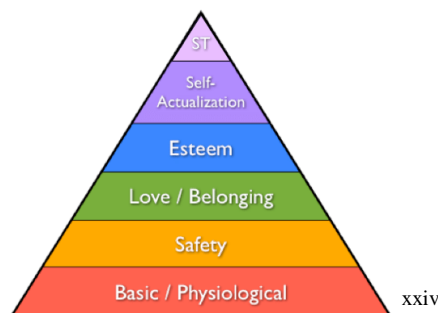


**Figure 1: Vedic Model of Four Needs**



**Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs**

Maslow's self-actualization level in this above model became subservient to yet another level that he developed later and that he identified as "self-transcendence":



**Figure 3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (Revised)**

Love/Belongingness

In this second model, we can observe the changing natures of philosophies when we rely on our limited mental perceptions, in comparison to the Vedic model that is unchanging. The very expression "self-transcendence" brings us closer to the Vedic conception of accepting a reality beyond our limited sensual and mental perceptions.

Having been exposed to the Vaisnava Vedic Perspective of Sociology, the readers should now be in a better position to understand the neglect of our three foremost natural mothers, namely: 1) Mother *Surabhi*, through the on-going exploitation and abuse of cows and other animals, 2) Mother *Bhumi*, through the abuse of land by the modern practices of ago-business and by the exploitation of natural resources of nature, and 3) Mother *Sarasvati*, through the misuse of knowledge in our modern educational systems.

## 6. The Neglect and Desecration of Holistic Values

Modernity, in its zest and zeal to free individuals and society from the bourgeois and ecclesiastic exploitation prevalent 400 years ago in Europe, in its new found credo of freedom, fraternity, liberty and equality for all, has ironically neglected and severely exploited the basic fundamental rights and values related to: 1) cows, through dairy business, 2) land, through agri-business, and 3) modern education, all three being intimately related to three clearly defined Vedic sciences meant to help societies develop into holistic, balanced, peaceful and prosperous nations. Can we honestly say that we have evolved since the days of the French Revolution? Author Rajani Kanth opines the opposite in his book *Farewell to Modernism: On Human Devolution in the Twenty-First Century*:

*It is the European, Modernist, Governors that have brought the ecological world to the very brink of existence, the societal world to breakdown, and the economic world to collapse. The world is suicidally nuclear today because of their venomous invention(s)... As such, it is the European Modernist, in particular the Anglo-Am set of forces, that is squarely responsible for where we are today: in the Greatest Crisis in the History of Our Species<sup>xxv</sup>.*

## 7. Conclusion

Never in the history of mankind has there been such rampant and unscrupulous exploitation among the human species, other species of life and of natural resources. Never have we seen such degradation in the character, morality and ethics of leaders and the general mass of people. The three fundamental Vedic sciences meant to protect, nourish, and give security to all, namely the Science of Education (*Trayi*), the Science of Governance (*Danda Niti*), and the Science of Economics (*Varta*), have practically been destroyed in modern day society. When we grossly neglect these fundamental principles of *dharma*, we can only but expect deterioration and corruption that results in ever increased suffering for all. And that is our unequivocal gloomy reality in the beginning of our third decade of the Twenty-First Century. One of the greatest proponents of *Bhagavat Dharma*, Srila Narada Muni, instructs the greatest leader of his times, Yudhisthira Maharaja as follows:

*dharma-mulam hi bhagavan sarva-vedamayo harih  
smritam ca tad-vidam rajan yena catma prasidati*

*“The Supreme Being, the Personality of Godhead, is the essence of all Vedic knowledge, the root of all religious principles, and the memory of great authorities. O king Yudhisthira, this principle of religion is to be introduced as evidence. On the basis of this religious principle, everything is satisfied, including one’s mind, soul and even one’s body”<sup>xxvi</sup>.*

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