



Far better it is to win a few moments of life in India than aeons of life in Celestial regions (heavens).

~ The Bhagvata (V. XIX. 20 – 22)

Punya Bhoomi Bharat:

It is a fashion with some ignorant scholars and boot-lickers of the British to go on repeating that the idea of nation did not exist in India before the British and that national unity was a “British Blessing”. This clever propaganda is exploded by authentic quotations from the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Upanishads.

Nation and Nationalism are generally considered to be modern concepts. But Sanskrit literature stands testimony to the fact that with us in Bharat the spirit of nationhood has been a living force from the very dawn of civilization. The two great literary masterpieces in Sanskrit, **the Ramayana and Mahabharat** almost belong to the “historic” period hence it is no wonder that patriotic references can be found in both. For instance, Rama says to Laxmana:

*Api Swarnamayi Lanka
Na me Laxmana rocahte,
Janani Janmabhoomishcha*

Swargadapi gariyasi.

“Oh Laxmana, even the golden Lanka has no fascination for me. For the **Mother and Motherland** are greater than heaven itself.”

The Mahabharata goes farther than this general sentiment and sings the praise of Bharat in a ringing tone:

*Atrapi Bharatam shrestham
Jambudweepe mahamune,
Yato hi karmabhooresha
yatonya blogabhoomayah.
Atra janma sahasranam
sahasrairapi sattama,
Kadachillabhate jantur
Manushyam punyasanchayat.*

“Bharat is the greatest land on earth, and it alone is the Land of Action while the rest are Lands of Pleasure. It is only after great acquisition of merit that a person gets the privilege of being born a human being in this country.”

Similar sentiments are also found in Vedic, Upanishadic and Brahmanic literature, the most ancient literature in the whole world. The nationalism manifested here may not have the well-defined and circumscribed character of today, but its spirit is the same.

Nation In Vedas:

The **Atharva Veda** gives a cryptic but significant explanation of how the Nation came into being:

*Bhadramichchanta rishayah swarvidastapo
deekshamupaseduragre.
Tato rashtram balamojascha jaatam
Tadasmai deva upasam namantu.*

“Desirous of achieving good of the whole people, the seersages did penance; and out of his penance emerged the Nation’s might and vitality. Therefore let the understanding men be devoted to the nation.”

It is remarkable that Vedic Aryans equated the nation with might and vitality and thus showed unequivocally the basic foundation of a prosperous nation.

The devotion to this nation was expressed by the Vedic Aryan in very simple but emphatic terms. On the most elementary level he declared.

Mata bhoomih putroham prithivyah.

“This land is the mother and I am her son.” That those who acknowledged the land as their mother were one family was realized even in those times. For the **Atharva Veda** declares:

Janam bibhrati bahudha vivachasm
nana dharmanam prithivi yathoukasam.

“This, our Motherland gives equal shelter to people speaking different languages and following different faiths.”

Such a heaven of refuge naturally evoked a sense of thankfulness:

*Twajjatastwayi charanti martyastvani
bibharshi dvipadastwam chatushpaddah.
Taweme Prithivi pancha manava
udyantsuryo rashmirabhirakanoti.*

“Oh Motherland, we humans have been born from your womb and we move upon your surface. It is you who nourish the bipeds as well as the quadrupeds. All humans are your children.

Birth in India is coveted even by the gods in Heaven. Says the Bhagavata:

*Etadeva hi deva gayanti:
Aho amisam kimakari sobhanam
Prasanna esam sviduta svayam Harih;
Yairjanmalabdham nrsu bharatajire
Mukundasevaupayikam spiha hi nah.
Kim duskarair nah kratubhih tapovrataih
Danadibhira dyujayena phalguna;
Na yatra Narayanapadapankaja –
Smrtih pramustatisayendriyotsavat.
Kalpayusam sthanajayat punarbhavat
Ksanayusam bharatabhujayo varam;
Ksanena martyena krtam manasvinah
Sannyasya samyantyabhayam padam Hareh –*

“The gods (in heaven) verily sing thus (of the glory of human birth in India):

“Oh! What auspicious deeds have these done that God (Hari) Himself has become pleased with them – deeds by which they have obtained birth in the continent of India, a birth which is the means for the service of God ? We also keenly desire (to have) this (good fortune).

“What have we achieved by winning this Heaven, small in itself, but involving austere sacrifices, penances, fastings, gifts and other means? Here (in Heaven) we lose the (very) memory of the lotus feet of Narayan (the indwelling God), due to an abundant exuberance of sense enjoyment!

“Far better it is to win a few moments of life in India than aeons of life in these celestial regions; because, there, heroic souls can achieve in a moment the state of fearlessness in God by renouncing in Him all actions done by their perishable bodies”.

Destroy Our Enemies:

Such prayers of thanksgiving were also mingled with a sense of pride in the Nation:

*Yasyah puro devakritaah kshetre yasya vikurwate,
Prajapatih prithivim vishwagarbham,
asham aham ranyam nah krinotu.*

“The towns of our motherland are built by the gods, and in its fields men perform various activities. In this land may Prajapati (the Creator) create beauty all around us.”

The nationalism of the Vedic Aryans was not only prayerful, as may be mistaken from these quotations, but also militant. They boldly prayed not only for peace on earth and good-will among men but also for the annihilation of their enemies:

*Yo no dweshat prithivi yah pritanyat
Yobhidasat manasa yo wadhena
Tam no bhoome randhaya purvakritwari.*

“Oh Motherland, those who hate us, those who assault us with armies, those who desire to enslave and to destroy us – may all these be destroyed.”

Perhaps these quotations might lead one to imagine that ancient Bharatiya nationalism was content merely with prayers and invocations to the Almighty. But that is not so. Vedic nationalists knew that preservation of nationalism meant cultivation of power in all spheres. Even while partaking of food and drink they were thinking of the national purpose to which the strength so built was to be put:

*Urje twa, balaya twa, ojase sahase twa.
Abhibhooyay twa, rashtra bhrityay,
puryoohami shatasharadaya.*

“Oh object, I accept (eat) you as food for strength, for vitality for endurance, for the service of the nation, for the conquest of enemies and for a full life of hundred year.”

Similarly:

*Abhivardhatam payasa abhi-rash-trema vardhatam,
Ramya sahasravarchasa emou stam anupekshitou.*

“May this bride and her groom attain strength from milk and may they profess with the progress of the nation.”

Now the feeling of nationalism that dwelt in the minds of Vedic Indians was not nebulous but had taken the concrete shape of love and care for Swarajya. In the **Rigveda** they pray:

*Aa yad vamiyachakshasa
mitra vayam cha surayah,
Vyachishte bahupayye
yatemahi Swarajya.*

“Oh people with a wide outlook and a friendly attitude, let all thinkers come together and endeavour for public good in a far-flung and well protected Swarajya.”

In the **Aitareya Brahmana** they go further and enumerate the various types of self-rule that happily prosper under a central Aryan kingship:

*Swasti. Samrajyam bhujyam
swarajyam vairajyam parmashthyam*

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“For the preservation of the country and of swarajya (self governance) – both of which were precious to them – the Aryans were always mindful to live in a closely knit corporate life. Their motto was:

***Samgacchadhvam Samvadadhvam
Sam vo manaamsi jaanataam.***

“Let us move together, let us speak together, let our minds think together and let our hearts feel together.”

“May this land to the shores of the sea be under one Aryan ruler.”

~ Bhikshu Chaman Lal

(Artist: Ashit and Hema Desai)