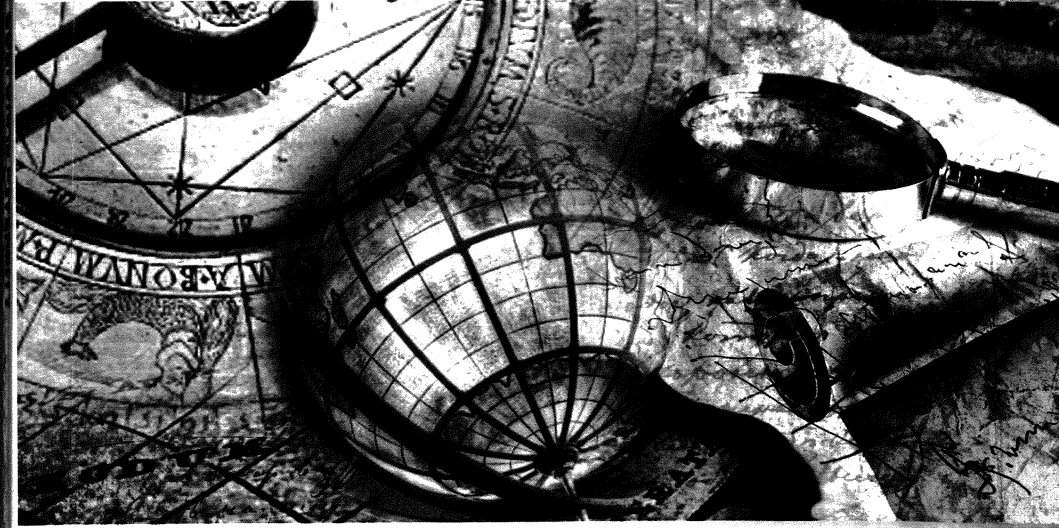


UPANISHADS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CURRENT WORLD CONTEXT

Upanisads have always been the backbone of Indian culture. They have helped human beings to withstand in spite of all the atrocities against them. The Upanisadic lore has always had a humanistic and socialistic outlook imbibing the intellectuals, freedom fighters, renaissance leaders etc., the same impact is going on to convey certain panacea for the current world crises. There are certain impractical notions in its practice on which social scientists and thinkers have to interfere and necessary corrections are to be made. This is happening from time immemorial and will continue. The same had happened during the renaissance period in a larger scale. The Volume comprises of articles highlighting Upanishads and Cultural Diversity, Upanishads and Religious Culture, Religious Diversity, Mystic tradition, Upanishad and Indian Polyphony etc., in Sanskrit, Hindi, Malayalam and English media.

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Dr. K. V. Suresh
Dr. B. Chandrika



Department of Vedanta
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit
Kalady, Ernakulam Dist, Kerala



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Department of Vedanta
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit
Kalady P.O., Ernakulam - 683574
Phone: 0484 2463380
drsureshkv@gmail.com

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Foreword

I am extremely happy to introduce the book *Upanisads and Cultural Diversity in the Current World Context* edited by Dr. K.V. Suresh and Dr. B. Chandrika, Professors in the faculty of Indian Metaphysics, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady. It is a collection of research papers compiled by them as the outcome of a National Seminar conducted by the Department on the same topic. Each paper analyses their problem deeply with novel ideas and stress the importance of the Upanisads and its philosophy in this modern time.

Upanisads are the treasure house of Indian culture epitomised by the illustrious saying *Unity in Diversity*. As our culture is based on diversity, every piece of literature originated in this land depicts certain ideas that safeguard our land with diverse cultures from the Vedas to the popular tales; an element of ethics is interwoven with the content of every one of them. Our ancient sages were fully aware of the fact that for a corporate life, mutual understanding and a good background of morality is necessary. The Upanisadic passages systematically depict the life of a person on earth and how he can make it fruitful and successful.

The Upanisads play an important role in the evolution of ancient Indian thought. The Vedanta school of philosophy is derived mainly from the knowledge of the Upanisads. Indian

C O N T E N T S

Foreword	i-iv		
Preface	v		
1. उपनिषत्सामाजिकबोधः Dr. V. Ramakrishna Bhatt	1		
2. THE RELEVANCE OF UPANIṢADS IN MODERN CONTEXT Prof. A. Subrahmania Iyer	9		
3. EVALUATING THE ECOLOGICAL NATURE OF VEDĀNTIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE FACILITATION OF THE UNISON OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY Dr. T. Vasudevan	15		
4. THE UPANIṢADIC TEXTS IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT Dr. B. Chandrika	31		
5. ROLE OF VEDĀNTIC TRADITION IN THE CONCEPTUAL DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY IN DAKSHINAVARTA Prof. Sreekala M. Nair	44		
6. GODLESS VEDĀNTA OF ŚIVAMUNI: AN INTERPRETATION OF UPANIṢADIC TRADITION Dr. Mai Ram	58		
7. UPANIṢADIC WISDOM: WESTERN AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY Dr. A. Girija	68		
8. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND LITERATURE Dr. V. R. Muralidharan	78		
9. UNDERSTANDING BIO-DIVERSITY THROUGH UPANIṢADS Dr. K. Muthulekshmi	83		
10. PARELLALISM OF MYSTICAL AND UPANIṢADIC TRADITIONS Dr. V. Suparna	88		
11. DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: EAST AND WEST Dr. Anil Pratap Giri	99		
12. UPANIṢADIC CONTRIVE IN EUROPE Dr. K. V. Suresh	108		
		13. THE ROOTS OF NEO VEDANTA	124
		Dr. R. Sharmila	
		14. DIALECTICS IN UPANIṢADS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ĪŚĀVĀSYA UPANIṢAD	136
		Dr. B. Sugeetha	
		15. UPANIṢADIC PHILOSOPHY OF DR. AMBEDKAR	151
		Dr. T. G. Sreekumar	
		16. THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF SARVEPALLI RĀDHĀKṚṢṆAN	159
		Dr. Sudha Mary Thomas	
		17. ADVAITA PHILOSOPHY AND THE MODERN WORLD	165
		Dr. Radharani P.	
		18. UPANIṢADIC CULTURE IN GĪTĀÑJALI	176
		Dr. Bijimol M. C.	
		19. PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION - VIVEKĀNANDA'S VISION IN THE LIGHT OF UPANIṢADS	182
		Dr. Shyji K. K.	
		20. SRI RĀMAKṚṢṆA'S THOUGHTS ON UPANIṢADS	190
		Dr. Sheena C. V.	
		21. NOTION OF UPANIṢADIC RELIGION IN VIVEKĀNANDA'S PHILOSOPHY	199
		Dr. Shini M. V.	
		22. SYSTEMATIC & PRACTICAL CONCEPTS IN AITAREYA UPANIṢAD FOR MODERN ERA	206
		Radhika P. R.	
		23. UPANIṢADIC INFLUENCE ON TAGORE	219
		Harisree K.	
		24. UPANIṢADIC EXHORTATIONS REFLECTED IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF VIJÑĀNABHIKṢU	225
		Gayathri O. K.	
		25. THE MYSTERY OF DEATH: ABHEDĀNANDA'S INSIGHTS ON KĀTHOPANIṢAD	232
		Divya N. K.	
		26. RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A READING ON RĀMAKṚṢṆA	245
		Sreeja P.	
		27. MULTICULTURALISM IN GREGORY DAVID ROBERTS' SHANTARAM	254
		Sabira K. I.	

of the deities. Perhaps there may be other Upaniṣads dealing with each one of these goddesses. The symbolical terms of tantras are used in them e.g., bindu, nāda, rajas, sthāna, tāraka, cakra etc., primitive forms of worship move hand in hand with the development of philosophical idea in India; the Upaniṣads give a philosophical garb to the popular forms of worship this is also true to Śaivism and Tāntrism which often makes an alliance with vedāntism. Pushpendrakumar (1986:25) opines that a critical study of the later Śakta Upaniṣads reveals that they follow closely the puranic basis of Śaktism which demonstrates the profound influence of the puranic literature on the ideas and speculations of these Upaniṣads. This is also true with the Śaiva and Sannyāsa Upaniṣads.

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**THE UPANIṢADIC TEXTS
IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT**

Dr. B. Chandrika

Usually, there is a saying that 'Text has a context' All the other texts we can have a context. But this cannot be right in the case of the Upaniṣads. They can be interpreted in such a way to suit with the then present social situation. It can be proved by the task taken by Adi Sankara while interpreting the Upaniṣads. When he started writing the Upaniṣadic interpretations there was a challenge which he had faced. He could see in the passages so many contradictory statements in the Upaniṣads. For example in certain passages as the cause of the Universe is depicted as Brahman. In certain other places it is depicted as Prāna, Akṣara, Ākāśa etc., then he had interpreted them as the synonym of the Supreme Brahman. Another thing that there are so many passages explain the origin of the Universe is being portrayed. In certain places, there are certain explanations as there is no such creation. He interpreted the same by classifying the whole teachings of the Upaniṣads have twofold nature as Parā and Aparā types of knowledge. The second type as the Para type and the former as Aparā. Of course, this is not a novel idea of the interpreter but is there in the Mundaka Upaniṣad. Even then he had generalized the statement and set right the contradiction.

As it is said one can rethink the current context of the Upaniṣads. We people should keep this in our mind that having a discriminative power we should contemplate on the Upaniṣadic thinking in such a way that we should pick those things which could assist our ideal living in the current context and not an adverse effect. The same idea is being taken by our elders in shaping certain projects such as India's struggle for independence, Muslim invasion, and Kerala struggle of communal imbalance. In all these situations our so-called social reformers have taken the very same Upaniṣadic philosophy for the well-being of the society. Here through an attempt is made to explain certain Upaniṣadic statements in tune with the current social atmosphere. This is made for the benefit of the common people from the current social situation to follow so that certain unhealthy practices can be avoided.

The man from the very birthday itself enjoys sorrows and he is thriving hard to get rid of these sorrows. From the very beginning of his race he has been asking means for getting rid of these sorrows and from the very beginning of our race sages have been answering these questions. Moreover, the predecessors have followed these answers. The very same thing is continuing until and will end only when the human race ends. The solution in this century will become obsolete in the next century or when new problems arise. We should not forget the fact that the basic things which our sages developed during pre-historic age will never become obsolete, for; they did not give the solution for that period only. Hence its relevance outstands and transcends all expectations and remains unshaken. Only we need

to explain it in accordance with the then prevailing situation. That has been doing from the time immemorial and is going on and will be going on until the end of human race.

Our forefathers have interpreted our treasure in tune with the current social situation and thereby motivated the mass. It has first happened during the lifetime of Ādi Śaṅkara at that time the Mrmemsakas vehemently overpowered the religious trends and they showed much stress only on the Yajñas and all the orthodox systems were neglected. Śrī Śaṅkara then interpreted the Upaniṣads and the other literature in such a way that he could revive the Vedic tradition back.

Later in the 16th century, Madhusūdanasarasvati wrote his Gūḍhārthadīpika commentary on the Gītā. This was also another need of the hour. At that time too India was facing a decisive plight. Pious Muslims frequently attacked and killed the Hindus especially at pilgrim centers such as Banaras. These conventional priests were safeguarded by a false law that exempted them from any legal punishment. At that time the helpless Hindus approached Madhusūdanasarasvati to do something to stop this injustice. He was then well known at the court of Birbal. As a resolution, Birbal indicated that he should systematize a militant band of the Sannyāsins to guard Hinduism. Thus was born at the hand of Madhusūdana the much respected Nāga sets of Vedānta Sanyāsins like the Muslim priests then the tenets of Hinduism, he wrote the commentary on the Gītā. Thus this commentary of the Gītā was also the need of the hour in a political settlement.

The next critical situation of our country was the freedom struggle. The torchbearer of Indian Renaissance and inspiration of Freedom movement Swāmi Vivekānanda heaved heavily from the Upaniṣadic passages. He motivated the people for *Pūrṇa svarāj*. Leaders who were largely inspired by Swami Vivekānanda and the Bhagavadgītā affected this radical change. Bāl Gaṅgādhār Tilak, Mahāyogi Aurobindo, and Mahātmā Gāndhī belong to this category. They also wrote commentaries on the Gītā with the objective of arousing popular activism for the freedom struggle. Each one has his own independent view on the teachings of the Gītā. Thus through his Anāsaktiyoga on the Gītā, Gāndhiji commenced the struggle. The very same Gītā taught Tilak for forming the Indian National Army. Nevertheless, all of them passionately believed in the value of the Gītā in strengthening the freedom movement and liberating India from the grip of British Imperialism.

The history of the National Movement in India differs from those of other countries. Indian freedom fighters were unarmed common people, peasants, merchants, teachers, lawyers homemakers and students instead of armed soldiers. It was a battle of ideas and thoughts. The philosophical training and the spiritual prospect of the supreme commander M. K. Gāndhī inspired them much. His novel method of warfare made a turning point in the world history. He was implementing the policy of *Anāsaktiyoga* at its best form for the first time on the world stage. No other leader in the history

had been able to do so in style. The credit goes to the mental discipline acquired by him through the constant meditation on the Gītā - which is the condensed form of the Upaniṣads.

Certain scholars came to the field at the worst situations of our country and interpreted the treasure in accordance with the then present social situation and thus solved the problems. The end of the 18th century in Kerala the priestly class and (Brāhmins) considered the lower class people as their slaves. There came Srī Nārāyaṇaguru and Chaṭṭambiswāmikal for lifting the downtrodden people. They also had interpreted the same treasure to make them aware of the same fact. At that time the situation of Kerala was different from that of Ādi Śaṅkara. At the time of Śaṅkara, his task was to reinstate Hinduism from the clutches of declined Buddhism and ritualism. Nārāyaṇaguru's task was to uplift the downtrodden people from the clutches of the upper-class people. The duty of the Guru was to comment on the scriptures in such a way as to transcend the caste system. This made him say *Matametāyālum Manuṣyan nannāyāl mati*- Whatever may be the religion, man should become good. Here he transcends the idea of religion.

At present India is also facing such a situation that loses all morality in our life. At the very same time, we are galloping to a technologically fit India. We are more and more addicted to a life of luxury which the Europeans had thrown away seeing its bad side effects. The product of this is the life of the man is devoid of health

physical, mental and moral. This is the time for each citizen of the nation to stand erect and canalize our young blood towards the moral teachings, otherwise they will become the future killers of the earth.

Cause of sorrows -

Seeing one as existing separate from the whole i.e. perceiving the totality of nature as separate from oneself is what is known as ignorance or *Ajñāna*. This ignorance leads one to see events in life as problem creating. One solution alone exists for such problem i.e. bringing out the light of wisdom or *Jñāna* which in essence is nothing but perceiving oneself as inseparably one with the whole. Perceiving that what is real in the whole is what underlies the being of oneself.

The solution, as per the *Gītā* - Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives suggestions on how we should do our duty for getting rid of the bondage of karma and of getting rid of sorrows. Attraction and repulsion are rooted in all the sense-objects. Man should never allow himself to be swayed by them because they are the two principal enemies standing in the way of his redemption (*indriyasyendriyasyārthe*)

The ultimate aim of all human endeavors is the attainment of happiness, peace of mind and avoidance of sorrows. However, throughout the recorded history we find that humanity has not yet achieved that goal. The spectacular development in science and technology have enabled one-third of the whole population to enjoy material exuberance and another one third to be above want. However, they are also unhappy with anxiety and tension which shows that

wealth, power and fame do not automatically bring happiness. The perennial problem as always has been there. It is best to think that to see him as one with the whole, not as an independently existing entity. Arjuna, the individual is nothing but the all under-lying reality manifesting itself in a particular form with the specific qualities of a warrior. Likewise every one of us has special features as name and form are nothing but in essence is the Supreme one.

The action takes place everywhere in nature in accordance with the modalities, one deluded by the same thinks that he is doing, but actually, we are following the rules of the *Prakṛti*. The individual does not have any kind of potentiality to do any action or deed (*evam pravartitam*). What we can do is only to concentrate on our duties. We have no part in the result, for it is already determined. The *Gītā* suggests simple ideas to get over the anxiety by an attitude of *Niskamakarma*. *Gītā* says one has the right to do his karmas. (*Karmaṇyevādhikāra*)

Another problem which our society faces today is that certain people hurt others. This is a type of violence. In *Gītā* Arjuna asks why people are hurting others or doing harm towards the others (*Atha kenaprayuktoya*) Kṛṣṇa says that *Kama esa krodh esa*)

I think it is relevant to look into the key teachings of the *Upaniṣads*. Almost all the *Upaniṣads* explain the origin of the Universe. According to Sankara the very aim of the *Upaniṣads* in explaining the origin of the Universe is for confirming the oneness of the Supreme i.e. (*Śṛṣṭipratipādakānām Vedāntavākyaṇām*)

Advitīye Brahmani Parisamaptih). The sole cause of the Universe is nothing but the one Supreme Brahman and the universe has no separate entity other than the Brahman and that the individual soul is nothing but the Supreme. Substantiating the last idea one can notice the Changyopaniṣad Upaniṣadic passage thus '*sadeva somyedamagra āsīd*' i.e. before creation, this Universe was one and without a second *Sat* and it had contemplated for creating the duals *Tadaikṣata bahusyām prajāyeya*. After creating the objects of the Universe it had decided to enter into the created objects as *Jīva* and make name and form. This means that the very same Supreme Brahman is there in all the created objects as *Jīva*. That means the individual soul is nothing but the Supreme. If we think one more step further, in essence, all of us or everything in this so-called universe is the manifestation of the so-called *Sat*.

Self-confidence, Potency and Courage are the three pillars erected by the Upaniṣads which are actually three indispensable characteristics for a successful life in the present world ambiance. As the self is the very basic factor of all the potency of every creature and the same is the soul innate in each individual. That Self is nothing but the Supreme in essence. This very knowledge itself creates Self-confidence and strength in each individual. The Upaniṣad itself says *Nāyamātma balahīnena labhyaḥ* i. e., this soul cannot be attained by weak. This means that those who attain the Self are to be beyond doubt being sturdy. The contemporary society needs strength and

the Upaniṣads commend that the Soul is gained only by the strong and by acquiring strength one can not only gain the Self but also can face the difficulties of life too.

The Upaniṣads extol that *Dvitiyād vai bhayam bhavati* i. e., fear arises when there is duality. Another verse in the Upaniṣad says *tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śokaḥ ekatvamanupaśyataḥ* i. e., for those who see oneness in everything there is no chance of delusion or sorrow. From the very birthday man enjoys sorrows and he is trying to find a sole solution for getting rid of this sorrows and the very same habit continues till his last breath. So if one could see his fellowmen as that he himself, there will be no chance of sorrow. If an Upaniṣadic statement evades the existence of a second entity naturally the fear will vanish. These are the three major needs of the hour and all these could be acquired by mere attainment of Self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is not a simple thing to be attained by everybody, even then the notion that there is nobody or nothing exists apart from the self, itself can create miracles.

In today's world, one can see the feelings of hatred and intolerance among the individuals everywhere. Nobody is ready to accept others because of the ego that I am greater than anybody in this world. Certain people dare to go to the extreme level to subdue the other. This leads to animosities, hatred and such tendencies which are not at all advisable for a healthy and prosperous existence of a country like India, where multi-lingual and multi-religious people live together. For such a country such a type of philosophy is needed which can put together the diversified nature of the society

that Advaita Vedanta philosophy proclaims. Hence the scholars argue that the Upaniṣads aim at right living and not that science and philosophy. They wish to liberate the soul from the trammels of flesh that it must enjoy communion with the God.

Let us look into very basic matters expressed in the Upaniṣads which are ever relevant for the wellbeing of the whole society. In the Taittirīyopaniṣad there are certain passages which are written in such an end in showing the purity of body, mind and soul for the comfortable living in this life. Only in a flawless body a flawless mind resides and only in a flawless mind a flawless Soul resides. For these three kinds of purity, one should be much careful. Another important thing the young generations forget often is that they fail to give respect to the elders. It is a common practice nowadays that there is a considerable growth in the emergence of old age homes in India. We are not ready to look after our old parents.

The paper is arranged in a three-dimensional way, i. e.,

1. The need of interpreting the Upaniṣadic statements in the current context.

2. the need of protecting our neighbors as in essence they are our own selves. and one should keep one's Mind, Body and Soul pure as these three are the basic ones through which one can attain ones highest goal of human life.

3. avoid the feelings of Kāma and Krodha which are the major enemies one will get in the current life.

We can classify the whole people of the world broadly into three types: people who wish to get transmigration from the trammels of life. There is an age long belief among the scholars that human life is meant for the attainment of salvation and people get the same after getting so many lives of other creatures and this human life is the benefit of one's good actions in previous lives and only in this life he can attain the supreme end of his life. The second types of people are those wish to live here comfortably by acquiring wealth, power etc. They will go to any extent to acquire the same. There is also another type who wishes to live here happily and that too without hurting others. If we think about the percentage, the first and the third type are below 20 percent and the rest are the 80 percent. It is astonishing to note that on the 20 percent the sustenance of the world depends. Hence the duty of the 20 percent is to take necessary steps to make increase the 20 percent, by popularising the Philosophy of the Upaniṣads.

This is the common fact among all the three types that are all wish to live here happily. Enjoyment of happiness depends on the mentality of the people. If the first group sees happiness in the fourth end of life i.e. *parama puruṣārtha* the others see the same in material measureable happiness. This happens due to the mental capacity of the people. By following the Upaniṣadic techniques the third group can be gradually taken to the height of the first group and thereby increase the percentage. Nobody or no scripture can help the second group. There is no medicine for misery and selfishness. They are destined to perish their life. They are merely destroying the golden

opportunity to escape from the trammels of life. Not only that much, they are really ruining the co-livers badly.

When we read the text of the Upaniṣads in the current context it very well addresses all these three types of people. One can see certain passages of the Upaniṣads are mystical in nature and the seers purposefully made those types for the interpreters who came to the earth in certain situations only those people can reveal the same in tune with the then present social situations and thereby help the common people in helping them in tackling that situation. This has been happening from the time of Ādi Śaṅkara and continuing through Madhusūdana Sarasavati. Mahatma Gandhi, SrīNārāyaṇa guru, etc and in future also some persons will arrive and they will too interpret the same statements of the Upaniṣads in tune with the then present social situation. One thing we could clearly say that we can not address the third group. They have to realize the situation and should change themselves at least to the second group. For the second group, there are so many tactics are being portrayed in the Upaniṣadic passages. Here at this stage, it is the duty of the philosophers to interpret the Upaniṣadic passages in tune with the then present social situations.

The current social situation is such that people have become more and more self-centered and more than that they are not ready to see their co-livers as their own self in essence. They try to see the third personness in the others. Actually, at this point, Advaita can interfere and it can proclaim the truth that even though one person is seemed as different from the other but actually, in essence, he is not

different from the other and, while hurting others, we are hurting ourselves. Krodha or Kāma or any such feelings arises in our mind, we should think that these two are the greatest enemies residing in us and these could spoil not only the respondent but also themselves, for at the time of Krodha we are passing through a critical atmosphere which can spoil our health. The only one solution remains in this earth for keeping all of us unite and feel like brothers and sisters are nothing but the very same Advaitic notion that nobody or nothing exists in this world other than the Supreme and that Supreme is residing in us in the form of name and form. We are having different forms in our appearance and different names as Latheef, Asokan, and Joseph but these names and forms are always changing and the essence in all of us are the one and the same. This very same notion can create a new light in our heart. This idea should be popularised so that the evil practices of killing our own brothers and sisters should be avoided. We have to interpret the very Upaniṣadic passages in this way and this kind of oneness feelings should be created by popularising this. Our *Sanātana dharma* concept is one that transcends time and space and the basis of this Dharma is nothing but Advaitic Vision only. Our duty is to interpret the same old statements in tune with the then present social situation what our elders have done during their lifetime. By this no killing, no hatred should have happened again and we can live here in complete happiness. We should be generous towards others and it is the secret of keeping ourself happy. Happiness is what everyone wishes to attain and which is within us but we fail to realize the same.