

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy in India is regarded as the philosophy of life.

India is a country where nature has showered her gifts and blessings. For, the Himalayan ranges in the north, with their high elevation and long ranges and deep seas on the southern sides have played a great role in maintaining her freedom from foreign invasions. Indians never had to toil hard for their survival as the Nature offered sufficient food, the tree lined avenues of the forests helped the people "... to think of the higher life, how to live how to live more perfectly in the spirit" (1) In ancient India, philosophy was always regarded as an independent discipline, as holding a lamp to all other disciplines and showing the way to understand the problems of the universe.

"Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual" (2) Philosophy in India is never above the life of individuals, as "spiritual motive dominates life in India." (3) Indian Philosophy originates in life and passing through the arguments of the different schools, it enters back into life once again. Basically, it is the philosophy of life having its root in popular belief and carrying out 'great systems of thought'. A socio spiritual reform is needed in the country and the character and much needed motives of any such moves are shaped by the philosophical thinkers as well as the religious minds. Therefore, religion in India is not dogmatic. It is a rational synthesis "into new conceptions as philosophy progresses" (4).

Now about the origin of Indian philosophy—is it traceable to the oldest scriptures i.e., the Vedas which are regarded as the oldest literary reminder of the Aryan minds? It is their belief or non-belief in the Vedas that the Indian systems are divided into two groups—the orthodox or the Astika Darsana consisting of Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta; while the other group includes the systems of Buddhism, Jainism and the Carvaka. These are the heterodox systems or the Nastika darsana.

But the question is—Do we have universal history of Philosophy?

The answer is, no we do not, for not all people have been able to give "...real systems of thought, and the speculations of on few can be said to have had a history." (5) In other words, Western Philosophers are not agreeable with the non-western ideas of philosophy and give them the names of poetry, myth, religion etc. In order to break this division of Western and Eastern thoughts and ideas, reference is made here to the supposed intellectual supremacy, cultural heritage, due to which philosophers of one particular tradition considering themselves to be supreme, reject the philosophical ideas of a different tradition. Nevertheless, despite such intellectual and cultural differences, the philosophical problems raised by Western and Eastern philosophers, and the solutions proposed are similar. In this respect, the striking thing to be noted is—Indian philosophy is pragmatic or has a practical application. So, although there is a difference between Western and Indian thinkers in respect of philosophical enquiry, the answers proposed by both of them are very similar. Therefore, any philosophical thought, if it has no bearing on life, is held to be empty and irrelevant. That is to say, Indian philosophers do not philosophize for the sake of intellectual advancement simply, but assimilate the intellectually discerned truth into their ways of life and lead a life of enlightenment.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of our discussion is—how and in what way the Indian Philosophical ideals are incorporated in one's life and how the Indian philosophers' view of reality influences the life and conduct of a person. Although the way in which the different systems of Indian Philosophy differ in the way of their interpretation of the ultimate Reality, they still have many features in common. For, in Indian Philosophy, the four basic aims of human life or Purusarthas recognized by the Indian tradition are to be realized with the guidance of the Indian philosophers. The Purusarthas are: Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Now, what does Purusartha mean?

In fact, the word can be derived as 'purusasya arthah' or in other words 'purusasya prayjanam' i.e, the necessity of a person. It is the belief of the Indian Philosophers that "Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are the four goals of human life." (6) These four goals indicate virtue, wealth, desire and emancipation respectively.

But the question is-Wherein lies this concept of Purusartha eagerly awaited by to be adopted by the Indian systems of thought?

As it is nowhere mentioned in the Vedic literature, so it is surely the contribution of the post Vedic literature and that of the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, depicting the society and also the social turmoil of the then society along with its rules and regulations. They classified the values into four classes—Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. In some cases, Purusarthas are considered to be consisting of only three and in the others as four (trivarga and caturvarga)—“trivarga dharmakamarthaih caturvargahsamoksakaih”. Manu following Amarakosa mentions trivarga i.e., Dharma, Artha, Kama; Acarya Dandi makes use of the term Caturvarga.

At this point we would like to discuss the meaning of Purusartha as per the different systems of Indian Philosophy and how the different systems react to them. According to Mahamohopadhyay Bhimacharya's Nyaykosa, Purusartha is the work done for the pleasure of Purusa, whereas Jamini Sutra -Vrtti holds that “., extinction of three kinds of affliction; Adhyatmika, Adhidaivika and Adhibhautika means attaining Param Purusartha or highest achievement i.e., Moksa” (7)

Vaisesika holds that, attainment of Real Knowledge is getting free from the fetters of the desires of life i.e., Moksa and once Moksa is attained, there is left no desire to get to know the real nature of Purusarthas.

Vedanta philosophy holds that sooner the avidya gets removed, the earlier the individual soul feels at one with the Brahman and this is attainment of Moksa.

It is believed that the four Purusarthas form the crux of Indian philosophy. Based on these four, the Indian systems proceed with their philosophical points of view.

As per the Carvakas, Kama and Artha are regarded as the means to attain the sensual pleasure which is the desired end. For, according to the Carvakas, only one human life is there to be enjoyed. After death, the body composed of, chaturabhuta (kshiti, ap, tej and marut) gets dissolved in these elements (vyom is excluded as it is not experienced by the senses). The body once disseminated into these four material particles, the life energy too disappears and there is no possibility of the same person to be born again. Therefore, Kama or sensual pleasure is the end and Artha is regarded as the means to realize the end. So, one should enjoy till death. Therefore, Kama and for the fulfilment of Kama, Artha is required. From here the Buddha and the Jaina Tirthankaras developed their philosophy of Niskama karma and renunciation from the material objects of life. Thereafter, following the paths recommended by them, Dharma is achieved and then the final goal of life or Moksha. It is not believing in the Vedic principles that makes them included in the Nastika group. Then evolved the Naiyayika system with their arguments and counter arguments followed by Vaisesikas, Sankhya, Yoga and the Mimamsa. Finally, crops up the system of Vedanta.

Besides Carvakas, other systems hold a harmonious combination of Dharma, Artha and Kama. As Dharma is the moral value, it should be regarded as the Supreme goal of life. In consequence, the Kama or the pleasure of life should be in accordance with the moral values of life. The great epics of India too comments on the Purusarthas. Mahabharata holds that Dharma, Artha and Kama are to be pursued equally while, Kalidasa in Raghuvamsa too follows the same order as in Mahabharata i.e., Dharma, Artha and Kama. In Gita we see that Dharma is the moral order which “is the direct property of the God.” (8) and Kama is conducive to Dharma.

Here we concentrate on the Advaita Vedantins propagated by Sankaracharya to whom only the Brahman is the Absolute, Real and the Absolute is manifested in all the individuals. The universal illusion brought about by our ignorance of the Reality, that the human illusory knowledge of ‘I’ or ‘Aham’ arises. Once the knowledge of Brahman is realised, the individuality vanishes and Brahman is experienced in everything around. Herein lies attainment of Moksa.

Again, Indian philosophy holds that, as a human being is composed of body, mind, intellect and soul, the scheme of practical values to be practiced in life is also four-fold. These values are the Purusarthas which can be regarded as the striving to reach the Mukti or spiritual goal. Hence, the order of the ‘caturvarga purusartha’ is—Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksa. This order of the Purusarthas, can be related with the four stages or Ashramas of life—“Brahmacarya, Garhastya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa.” (9)

METHODOLOGY

The methodology can be regarded as two-fold:

I) A theoretical study of the four-fold Purusarthas or the goals of life as these are reflected in the four stages of life—Brahmacharya, Garhastya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa.

II) A probe into the practical life and thereby observe how these are implemented in the different Asramas of life.

I) We have seen how the Purusarthas are dealt with by the different systems of Indian Philosophy with their diverse viewpoints. Theoretically, the Nastika schools though agree on their non-compliance with the Vedas, however, differ in their opinion on Purusarthas. Among the Nastika schools, Carvakas reject Dharma and Moksa, clinging onto Kama and Artha; Bauddhas consider Nirvana (Moksa) as the ultimate goal of life; whereas the Jainas regard “... path to freedom from all forms of bondage and illness” (9) as the ultimate discovery. They believe strongly in salvation and that each man should work out for his own salvation. “Reliance on one's own efforts to the exclusion of grace, divine or human, in one's struggle for perfection and freedom renders Jainism a religion fit only for the courageous...” (10) Therefore, ultimately, it is the Moksa which is highlighted.

Coming next to the Astika schools, we note that the different stages of life or the ashramas are reflected the four Purusarthas in their own glory.

The systems of Nyaya, Vaisesikas, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and finally the Vedantins accept the four Purusarthas as the guiding principles which help one through the different stages of life.

II) Practically, it is the fourfold Purusarthas which are regarded as the four aims of human life. The first stage being the Brahmacharya or the student life, the period embraced is that of education and that is the Dharma. The second stage is that of Garhastya or the life of a householder where the practical application of Dharma is the craving for Artha and pursuit of Kama. During the final two stages of life i.e., that of Vanaprastha and Sannyasa, the Dharma there is the craving and the pursuit of Moksa. Since the beginning of one's life, one has to pass through these four Ashramas in his journey towards spiritual upliftment of life.

In fact, Dharma guides one through the different stages making it binding on the individuals to follow certain paths in certain stages so that fulfillment occurs. It stands between the material gains of life and the attainment of highest spirituality. That is to say, the "Purusarthas bridge the gulf between material and spiritual realities."
(11)

CONCLUSION

At the end we can assimilate the four Purusarthas and their importance in the life of the Indians as per Indian Philosophy. The two broad divisions in Indian Philosophy based on compliance or non-compliance with the Vedic principles, does not make the systems not quite agreeable with the fourfold Purusarthas. Only they differ in their priority and the importance to be attached. Having discussed almost all the systems in respect of individual's different stages of life and the role played by the Purusarthas, we next turn our attention to the Advaita Vedanta and examine the role of the Purusarthas therein and whether the Vedanta view can be harmonised with the other systems.

Here we concentrate on the Advaita Vedantins propagated by Sankaracharya to whom only the Brahman is the Absolute, Real and the Absolute is manifested in all the individuals. The universal illusion that the Brahman is split or manifested in different individuals is brought about by our ignorance of the Reality, which is termed as 'Maya', that the knowledge of 'I' or 'Aham' arises. Vedanta philosophy helps to remove this nescience and identify the individual soul i.e., Jiva with Brahman. Once the knowledge of Brahman is realised, the individuality disappears and Brahman is experienced in everything around.

The problem on which there is difference of opinion in the Vedanta schools is: What is the nature of the relation between Jiva and Brahman i.e., between the individual selves and the Supreme self (12) As per Madhva the two are identical; as per Samkara, Jiva and Brahman are one; only difference lies in its, manifestation whereas according to Ramanuja, Jiva and Brahman are related with each other but in the way as parts are related to the whole. But the concept of Mukti or Moksa is equally important. In relation to it arises the concept of Maya or Adhyasa which covers the real nature of Brahman or the Supreme self and makes him appear as many individual selves as there are mundane individuals around. Once the ignorance is removed i.e., realization dawns in man, he feels that he is at one with the Brahman and therein lies Moksa. "... Jiva Brahmoib na poroh".

At this point, mention can be made of Swami Vivekananda and his explanation of Practical Vedanta. As per Vivekananda, mundane individual beings are God in the true sense of the term. Service to the living beings is service to the God.

"Bohurup sonmukhe tomar
Chhari kotha khujichho Iswar
Jibe prem kore jei jon sei jon sebichhe Iswar."

END NOTES

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