
UNIT 1 NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The literal meaning of the word 'philosophy' is 'love of wisdom,' which has been split into '*philo*' and '*sophia*.' Since the term 'philosophy' is fascinating, but elusive, there are several definitions for this term. All the definitions centre on the intellectual exercise concerned with the nature of reality from human perspective. Mainly philosophy deals with the perennial problems of life. As life is a complex and complicated phenomenon, the role of philosophy is immense in making an enquiry into the issues emerging in human life. Issues concerning with social, political, moral, religious, racial, cultural, linguistic and economic spheres, confront human beings; the impact of philosophical investigation gains significance in explicating the real meaning or goal of life. Through this unit students would understand the nature of philosophy in relation to its different branches and the characteristic features of Indian philosophical systems.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy develops a fascination for wisdom which is different from knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through the sense organs and mind while wisdom is obtained through the influence of the spirit called the self or soul. The former is fallible, conditioned, limited and alterable whereas the latter is infallible, unconditional, unlimited and unalterable. Though philosophy initially commences with knowledge, it culminates in wisdom. Only the men of wisdom are called 'wise men' or 'philosophers' in the genuine sense of the term. The root element for both of these exercises is 'thinking.' An ordinary human being thinks casually, but a philosopher thinks sincerely, seriously and systematically especially for the annihilation of the afflictions

arising in human life. In this process a philosopher hesitates to accept any fixed explanations, beliefs or principles; rather it engages in dedicated persistent and systematic inquiry into the prevailing assumptions, methods, as well as criteria by which critical distinctions are made.

It is a well known fact that life is full of mysteries, containing lot of miseries. Life is generally and characteristically defined as the span of existence from cradle to grave. A child is born, grows, marries, brings forth offspring and dies. The doubt remains as to what happens to the soul after death, how does a soul enter into the body before birth? Why are we born? Why should we live? Why are there so many hurdles in life? How are we to overcome sufferings? What is the importance of material life? Is spiritual life superior to material life? What are permanence and change? Why are they caused? What is the problem of one and many? How was the world created? What is the stuff out of which it has been created? Will the universe exist for ever? Is there any super power called God? How is God related to the soul and the world? Is the soul one or many? What are appearance and reality?

Philosophy endeavours to explain through speculative reasoning the possible answers to these varieties of questions. Since each philosopher develops his own answer in accordance to his intellectual calibre, we have variegated philosophical truths. One thinker refutes the other and comes forward with his own viewpoints which are subsequently refuted by successive philosophers. This attitude is based on the historical situation of the philosopher. Metaphorically speaking, a philosopher inhales much before he exhales, i.e., he studies the environment in which he lives, the philosophical predicaments pronounced by his predecessors, the scriptures or literature available during his times, and develops dialogue, discussion, argument etc., with his rival thinkers so that he sharpens his intellect before exhibiting his philosophical doctrines. The method of refuting the alien view and the presentation of one's own view results in the enrichment as well as enhancement of wisdom to the ardent admirers of philosophy. New vistas of knowledge open the floodgates of wisdom thereby eliminating ignorance. Almost all philosophers both in the occident and the orient have unanimously declared that ignorance causes misery and the remedy for all maladies is acquiring wisdom.

Philosophical wisdom manifests in several ways – mainly theoretical and applied. The former is explanatory while the latter is the combination of both theory and practice. Rational discussions emanate mainly from four perspectives; metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and religious.

1.2 METAPHYSICS

The etymological meaning of this term is that which transcends the physical realm. In physics we have direct accessibility to the material world and experience its manifestations in actual life. Metaphysical issues are deeply concerned with the intellectual analysis of the deep intricacies of the reality. In fact the truth about the 'reality' cannot be demonstrated or substantiated, but cannot be denied also. The facts about reality are conceptualized and described. Hence we have both positive and negative approaches to reality. Further the multifarious reflections of reality

enabled the philosophers to contemplate on an ultimate reality and elucidate its nature and characteristic features variously. Thus the idea of God gains more significance as the ultimate reality. Philosophers who have theistic bent of mind have attempted to prove the existence of God logically and then only they exemplify the nature and functions of God based on certain religious scriptures. The interpretation of the scriptures has made the contemporary thinkers coin the term and explain it in terms of 'hermeneutics.' The belief in one God is known as monism, two Gods, dualism and many gods, pluralism. Some philosophers develop counter-arguments to the proofs and show their inadequacy or invalidity. Some other thinkers bluntly reject the existence of God with atheistic temperament and clinching arguments as well. The ontological, cosmological, moral, teleological and design are some of the titles on which the proofs for the existence of God are based. God and other associated activities like rituals, festivals etc. are extensive studies on religion.

Another important metaphysical concept is soul or self, the sustaining force in all human and other living species, responsible for consciousness. Like God, the existence of the soul also has been established through logical arguments. The materialists deny the existence of a permanent abiding substance in the body. That substance which is responsible for all subjective phenomena is termed as the real and the realization of this self will pave the way for freedom from all sufferings. The ancient Greek philosophers had pronounced the famous slogan 'know thyself.' The idea of the self has a tinge with God of religion that it is the citadel for God to dwell in. As usual the atheists deny the existence of both of them and according to them death is the end of life. None can 'see' or 'feel' the so-called self. Only the mind and the sense organs both outer and inner are responsible for human experience. Further the terms like 'causality,' 'time,' 'space,' 'universals,' 'particulars,' 'matter,' 'form,' 'mind,' 'body,' 'idealism,' 'rationalism,' 'free will,' 'determinism,' 'naturalism,' 'solipsism' etc., are some of the metaphysical concepts which have been promulgated with arguments and equally rejected logically.

The logical positivists and the linguistic analysts have attempted to eliminate the very notion of metaphysics from the purview of philosophy based on the principle of verification. All verifiable statements are sensible and the non-verifiable statements are non-sensical and hence metaphysics is impossible. However, there are certain statements pertaining to future like the 'can' statements are neither verifiable nor non-verifiable. Hence the notion of verifiability has been bifurcated as 'strong' and 'weak' verifiabilities. In spite of the opposition to metaphysics, the study of metaphysics still retains its importance.

1.3 LOGIC AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Since thinking process and the 'thought content' form the basis of all philosophical investigations, the role of logic and epistemology becomes very significant and immense. Logic has been derived from the root 'logos' which means 'thinking.' It has been succinctly defined as the normative science of correct thinking. It is a scientific study or systematic analysis of our thinking methodology and its product viz., 'thought.' The thought process takes place thus: A unit of thought is judgement; when a judgement is expressed in a language, it becomes a sentence. All sentences are to be converted into the logical structure viz., propositions have

subject-predicate formula with a copula which should be always in the present tense. Only in this structure the linguistic expressions are considered true or false or doubtful. Aristotle is considered the father of traditional logic. Again, logic is treated as a normative science and not as a positive science. A positive science is one whose subject matter are studied 'as they are.' All natural sciences, a few human sciences such as sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, economics etc., are studied systematically whose contents are viewed from an existential point of view. No norms are prescribed for the study.

Logic, ethics and aesthetics are the normative sciences whose subject matter are studied from the 'ought to be' point of view. Logic insists on how one ought to think rather than how one is actually thinking. After a statement is made we pass judgements whether the statement is true or false and then we determine how that statement ought to have been uttered or written. There are two kinds of logic, viz., traditional and modern. The former is also known as Aristotelian logic which consists of two sections, deduction and induction. Deductive logic is seriously concerned with the formal nature or structure of statements or propositions so that their validity or invalidity is ascertained. From a given proposition we proceed to a conclusion through some common expressions, instantly or through a medium. Also we proceed from statement to conclusion or vice-versa. In induction the very validity of the given premise is questioned. It is a method through which the major proposition which is generally a universal one is obtained. Based on certain postulates the induction method proceeds from a few particular cases to universal truth. It has been established based on observation, experiment, hypothesis, analogy, enumeration etc. Universal statements are discovered which are supplied to deductive reasoning for the application of particular instances so that the conclusion is made beyond doubt. All scientific inventions and discoveries are based on this method.

The modern logic has obtained a new dimension wherein symbols are used instead of statements and like mathematics, based on certain formulae, the arguments are proved as valid or invalid. Propositional calculus, predicate calculus and axiomatic principles are dimensions of modern logic. All the defects and deficiencies of traditional logic are rectified through formal doctrines and authentic proofs and verifications. The modern logic is also known as mathematical logic. Symbols are used for conjunctive, disjunctive, implicative and negative propositions and arguments are verified through conjunctive normal forms and certain rules of inference etc.

Epistemology or theory of knowledge envisages the messages about the methods and techniques involved in knowledge itself. It is a deep study about the origin of knowledge, nature of knowledge, relevance of knowledge and validity of knowledge. The relationship between human mind and the phenomenal world which culminates in knowledge is analysed in epistemology. Theories of truth such as correspondence theory, coherence theory and pragmatic theory form an important subject matter in this subject.

1.4. ETHICS OR MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Another branch of philosophy is ethics which has been derived from the root '*ethos*' which literally means conduct. Hence ethics is a normative science of human conduct in relation to human environment. The term '*moral*' has been derived from the root '*mores*' which means behaviour. Ethics is seriously concerned with perfect human living with certain codes or principles pertaining to conduct and character. All human beings have critical situations to deal with; the reflection or reaction to such situations will determine the moral attitude of men. Morality commenced with the habits of individuals and when large number of people develop similar habits they become customs thus constituting customary morality or conventional morality. This process involves also instinct. We pass moral judgements on the instinctive behaviour of individuals whether good or bad or right or wrong. Good and bad are concerned with value while right and wrong are attributed to the established regulations or laws of the society or state. The herd instinct, the prudence, thirst, appetite, sex etc., are some of the instincts and how they are satisfied will pave the way for estimating the validity of behaviour. In the development of ethical codes, the role of reflective morality is immense. All the human activities are analysed from the perspectives of motivation, intention, consequence, etc. resulting in several theories of morality.

The fundamental question to which moral thinkers come forward to respond is: what is the standard of morality? What is the basis on which the human conduct is examined? What is the criterion by which the actions are judged to be good or bad, right or wrong? How are the norms or standards formed? As a normative science of human conduct ethics helps us in suggesting several criteria to judge human actions. They are classified as historical or classical and modern. The first one starts from Plato. Plato insists on knowledge and lack of knowledge will lead to evil. Leading a good life according to him is similar to the discovery of mathematical truth through mental power or ability. Aristotle promotes the idea of golden mean that perfect virtue lies between two extremes and a life of moderate action will bring forth happiness.

We come across several standards of morality such as hedonism (both psychological and ethical) that all human actions are oriented towards happiness; Epicureanism and cynicism come under hedonism; stoicism is a theory which advocates individual's perfection by learning to be indifferent to external influences; utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill proposes that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the standard of moral judgement. The former advocates gross utilitarianism while the latter subtle; Intuitionism, evolutionism, Marxism, Kant's critique of practical reason providing good will are some of the traditional theories of morality.

In the realm of modern ethics we have precise theories based on philosophical analysis to moral theories in connection with necessary and sufficient conditions. There are three different classifications of modern theories; i) either subjective or objective, ii) as naturalistic, non-naturalistic or emotive and iii) as motivist, deontological or consequence theories. All these theories are primarily concerned with the analysis of the language of morals. Any theory which is non-subjective is objectivistic. Ethical judgements become subjective when they depend on the psychology of the person who alters them. If a moral judgement is reduced to natural science (especially psychology) with true or false formula then that is naturalistic. If they are not reducible to natural science then they are non-naturalistic. If any moral judgement is neither true

nor false, but consists of the expressions of feelings or emotions, and then it is emotive. If a moral theory is based on motive to determine its rightness or wrongness, then that is motivist. Deontological theory does not depend upon motive or consequence but upon the obligation or duty. If the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined based on the effect, then that is known as a consequence theory. All the theories whether classical or modern are having critical estimation which really enriches our knowledge of ethics.

1.5. RELIGION

Another important branch of philosophy is religion which deals with the establishing of an intimate rapport with the Supreme Being or Reality or God. It has been generally claimed that philosophy without religion will lead to dogmatism or dry intellectualism. Similarly religion without philosophy will culminate in superstition or blind observances. Hence both philosophy and religion are complementary in clarifying the subtle implications of all rituals. The origin of religion is wonder or fear. Ancient people wondered the wonderful structure of the world and postulated that a wonderful superpower must exist to create such a magnificent universe. Some people were terrified over the terrors and horrors of the natural phenomena. As the scientific knowledge of such events was absent in those days, they were afraid of them and each force had been personified as a deity and oblations were offered; prayer songs arose; treatises on adoring such deities also emerged. A few religious people with metaphysical bent of mind wrote commentaries to such religious texts. This attitude enhanced and enriched the glory of that religious tradition. The idea of God has been introduced as a postulate and any religion with a God Supreme is based on belief, faith, love, hope and harmony.

The existence of God has been proved from three angles; i) logical, ii) scriptural and iii) experiential. Logically there are five proofs such as ontological, cosmological, moral, teleological and design. Scriptures vouchsafe for the existence of God revealed by eminent sages and saints. Experience of God in the bottom of the heart and soul is the best proof for the existence of god. The all-pervasive, all-knowing and all-powerful God is essentially required for human life mainly for expressing love or technically known as devotion or *bhakti*. For, God is personified as the very embodiment of love and this love of God towards mankind is expressed through creation, preservation, destruction and bestowal of grace. It is God's grace that sustains human beings at every moment. There are a few religions which deny the existence of a Supreme God, like Jainism and Buddhism, but they convey the idea that man can be elevated to the level of God through virtuous and compassionate living. The dwelling places for God have been constructed such as temple, church, mosque, *gurudwara* etc., and a few days are designated as auspicious and special rituals, festivals, prayers, worships etc. are offered to the presiding God in the dwelling spot. The firm belief is that God will redeem the afflicted souls and bring them ashore from the onslaught of transmigratory existence.

It is the human soul which has been tantalised between the sacred and the profane. The luring phenomenal world has an admixture of suffering and happiness; but the engrossment in divine ecstasy will engender self illumination and lead to divine communion which is characteristically

termed as the 'path of no return.' The existence of the soul also has been proved logically and intuitively as well. Self-realization becomes an inevitable prelude to God-realization. It is the soul which knows with the help of the mind and sense organs, but relinquishes the empirical entanglements so that it can move towards God and enjoy His perennial bliss eternally.

Philosophy of Religion also analyses deeply the problem of evil. Some religions declare that man has invited evils due to baser temperaments and baseless temptations; some other religions emphatically hold that it is God who has caused evil so that only after the experience of the torture of evil forces, mankind will engage in overcoming them for which the holy scriptures and discourses of enlightened personalities serve as the guiding spirit. But still the question remains. If god is benevolent and merciful, evil should not exist; but evil persists. Therefore God is not omniscient and evil is a thorn in the gracious nature of God. Religious scholars endeavour to appropriately settle the issue of evil. Most of the religions are mainly concerned with the notions of bondage and liberation. Once again the idea of soul and the conception of God are involved in this process. The soul before embodiment was pure and free, but after entering into the body it becomes bound due to self-centredness, selfish activities and attachment towards the peripheral worldly objects. Through serious involvement in religious engagements and systematic adoration with sincere devotion, the devotees believe staunchly that they can overcome bondage and attain liberation. Becoming recipients of God's grace is the only remedy to all human maladies. The everlasting solace from the worries of the world is the objective of religious life.

Another interesting factor in the religious philosophy is religious language especially found in the revelatory texts. When the saints are soaked in divinity they undergo some peak, but unique experiences which cannot be expressed at that time. Afterwards they recollect the past events and reveal them for posterity and for the betterment of the world. While doing so they refer to God's nature, soul's movements and the pernicious aspects of the world which fall under the legitimate province of the philosophers. The revealed texts contain perfect semantics, syntax and pragmatics. This phenomenon has been attributed to divine mystery.

Besides metaphysics, logic, ethics and religion, philosophy has a few applied avenues like philosophy of beauty dealing with the delightful joyous enjoyment or aversion due to ugly nature of objects of beauty. Technically this subject is known as aesthetics. Linguistic philosophy deals with the role of language in philosophical explanations, words, sentences, meaning and their interpretations are well analysed in developing sensible expressions. Political philosophy gives a fairly good account of origin of states, forms of government, social contract theories, the role of rulers and citizens in political settings etc. Social philosophy develops the views about human relationship in social aspects, such as group formation, social conflicts, social change etc.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1. How do you understand 'Philosophy'? and Explain.

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2. Relate philosophy with other disciplines.

1.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

By 'Indian Philosophy' we mean the philosophical systems emerged from the Indian soil. Some scholars call it Hindu philosophy. It is not so, since a few non-Hindu systems are included such as Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism which are really critical of Hindu doctrines. Indian philosophy has been designated as '*darsana*' which is generally translated as philosophy, but it is really means intuitive vision. 'philosophy' is accepted as the nearest equivalent term to *darsana*. A few saints of the highest order develop certain unique or mystic experiences and reveal them for the benefit of posterity. The spiritual heritage commences with such revelations and they are testified by reason by a few sages who have developed metaphysical bent of mind. The intuitive vision consists of the wisdom about reality and the secrets of human life both inner and outer. The interpretations of such wisdom form the basis of philosophical inquiry pertaining to metaphysical doctrines, logical truths, ethical codes and religious practices.

The book *sarva darsana samgraha* written by Sri Madhavacariya contains the quintessence of a few systems of thought evolved in ancient India. A large number of scholars, taking into account the contents of this work as the basis, have written volumes of work of Indian philosophy from the historical, conceptual, textual, evaluative and descriptive perspectives. It has been proclaimed that Indian Philosophy is scripture-based. The revelations of the saints have been codified and they are classified as having broadly the ritualistic sections and the section on wisdom or *jnana*. The general name given to the holy text is '*veda*' which has been derived from the root, '*vid*' which means to know. The Vedic scripture is the ancient treasure trove which exemplifies the cultural heritage as well as religio-philosophical aspects of the Vedic systems. It contained both ritualistic and philosophical materials. Philosophical system like Purva Mimamsa directly developed its doctrines from the ritualistic portion and other schools of Vedanta built up their philosophical system from the upanisadas, the philosophical portion of the Vedas. Generally Indian systems are classified as orthodox and heterodox systems, *astika* and *nastika* systems, on the basis of acceptance or rejection of the Vedic authority. The philosophical schools that accept the vedic authority are the following; Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism do not accept the vedic authority.

1.7 SPECIAL FEATURES OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

1. Almost all the schools of Indian thought emphatically declare that *moksha* or liberation is or should be the ultimate goal of life. Only the *puranas* describe the life after death pointing out the existence of hell and heaven with popular anecdotes. Intellectually it implies that one must free oneself from the cycle of births and deaths by putting an end once for all to the strife-torn life. To achieve this ambitious goal, the Indian philosophers suggest certain means starting from lower values to reach higher and the highest values. Wealth and sensuous enjoyment are considered as having lower values, while *dharma* or righteousness is regarded as the higher value. Obviously *moksha* is the highest value. These four values are obligatory in the life of everyone on this earth and hence they are called as *purusharthas*, the human values.

2. Indian Philosophy expects the seekers after truth and release to lead a life of renunciation. The life of attachment will engender suffering while the life of detachment will result in eternal solace. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna categorically asserts that a life of renunciation alone will enable the aspirants to reach the domain of God. So all the schools of thought have treated 'suffering' as one of the motivating factors for philosophical thinking. Only when the mind is purified through non-attachment, it will have pure and perfect wisdom and rest on self-illumination, the real prelude to *moksha*. In fact, suffering or painful experience in life give the motivating force to promote new vistas of thinking and acting. Buddha built up philosophical doctrines on the edifice of suffering and all his noble truths centred around this concept only. The only difference that is noticed among the schools of philosophy is that according to the theistic thinkers only by the grace of God one can overcome suffering, while others insist upon individual efforts through moral, physical, psychological and spiritual means.

3. The commencement of Indian philosophy based on suffering prompted a few critics to label Indian thought as pessimistic. Even though Indian philosophy looks at the darker side of life in elucidating the issues emerging in life, the mission with which one has to overcome suffering overcomes the criticism too, i.e. Indian thinking though starts with pessimism passes through optimism and culminates in eternal pragmatism. The Indian thinkers have realised the truth that a vision without a mission is blind; a mission without a vision is drudgery and a healthy combination of both vision and mission will make human life prosperous. The pleasure which we enjoy is mixed with pain is engendered in painful situation. The seers assert that it is possible to eliminate pain altogether and enjoy a life of bliss, *ananda*. Hence they are seriously concerned with *sat*, existence which is the truth also, *cit* (consciousness), and *ananda* (everlasting happiness).

4. In the hierarchy of values, Indian thinkers have classified as lower values, higher value and the highest value. The axiological approach in human life becomes immense in this analysis. Carvaka system considers *kama*, sensuous pleasure as the only human value, *purushartha*, while *artha* or wealth serves as the means to achieve such ambitious aims. But the orthodox schools treat both *kama* and *artha* as the lowest and lower values respectively. They cannot annihilate the human afflictions thoroughly. They are to be checked and continued as to regularise normal human existence. On the other hand they consider *dharma*, righteousness, as the higher value and *moksha* as the highest value. Only men of virtuous living can aspire for a blissful life where there is no iota of pain. While explaining the state of liberation, *mukti*, some thinkers advocate *jivan mukti*, liberation while alive and *videha mukti*, liberation after the disintegration of body

and soul. As salvation becomes the salient feature of Indian philosophy it is more optimistic and treats life as having a brighter side.

5. Another important characteristic feature of Indian philosophy is the law of karma, which is based on the scientific law that all actions have equal and opposite reactions and the famous adage, 'As you sow, so you reap.' All the actions will yield the results and the efficacy of the fruits is known as '*karma*' which has been derived from the root *kr*, which means action. The karmas which cause us to take birth and store up while we are born is known as *sancita karma*. The karmas which have started yielding the fruits are known as *prarabdha karma* and the karmas which we accumulate through our volitional behaviour are known as *agamic karmas*. Even those systems which do not accept God, believe in the doctrine of *karma* which is the sole reason for the cycle of births and deaths. Due to the grace of God along with human *dharmic* endeavours the enforcement of karmic forces may be annulled. The *Sancita karma* would be totally burnt due to the grace of God through the *guru* or preceptor. But *prarabdha karma* which has started fructifying like the arrow sent out of the bow will affect the body and annihilate it. For it cannot harm the soul since it is spiritually strengthened and illumined. All the systems of Indian philosophy, in one way or the other insist upon the moral training as a prelude to metaphysical understanding and religious experience. Only the Carvaka system is rigorous and gives much importance to sensuous pleasure by ignoring righteousness, *dharma*, and all the cherished norms. The other schools though not explicitly elucidate the significant role of moral codes in human life, they emphasise the necessity of ethical principles to be adapted to actual life leading to virtues and resulting in happiness. Yoga system in the means for attaining *Samadhi* places *yama*, the five principles to be refrained from and *niyama*, the five practices to be adhered to, in the beginning itself. It is generally proclaimed that it will seldom lead to immortality.

6. Religion, an important branch of philosophy, also plays a vital role in Indian thought. Vedic religion is the starting point of philosophy in India. Vedantic thought, especially visistadvaita and Dvaita are directly based on vaishnava religious tradition. Saiva Siddhanta has Saivism and worship of Siva as the religious basis. Advaita at the empirical level does not deny the concept of Isvara and resorting to religious practices. In fact, Sankara has composed several devotional songs on Lord Siva, Sakti, Vishnu and Muruga. Though we have several religious sects with these religions constituting Hinduism, each religious sect has developed its own speculative metaphysics as well as means for redemption.

7. On par with Western philosophy, Indian philosophy also has dealt deeply with political ideologies, social doctrines, linguistic analysis, aesthetic explanations, cultural heritage and encompasses all the basic features of life. It builds up a fundamental structure with scriptural edifice and rational construction with spiritual super structure.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What are the general characteristics of Indian Philosophy?

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2. Spell out some of the specific features of Indian Philosophy?

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

Mainly philosophy deals with the perennial problems of life. As life is a complex and complicated phenomenon, the role of philosophy is immense in making an enquiry into the issues emerging in human life. Issues concerning with social, political, moral, religious, racial, cultural, linguistic and economic spheres, confront human beings, the impact of philosophical investigation gains significance in explicating the real meaning or goal of life. The unit has deliberated on the nature of philosophy in relation to its different branches and the characteristic features of Indian philosophical systems. Philosophy develops a fascination for wisdom which is different from knowledge. Philosophical wisdom manifests in several ways – mainly theoretical and applied. The former is explanatory while the latter is the combination of both theory and practice. Rational discussions emanate mainly from four perspectives; metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and religious.

By ‘Indian Philosophy’ we mean the philosophical systems which emerged in the Indian soil. Some scholars call it Hindu philosophy. It is not so, since a few non-Hindu systems are included such as Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism which are really critical about Hindu doctrines. Indian philosophy has been designated as ‘*darsana*’ which is generally translated as philosophy, but it really means intuitive vision. ‘Philosophy’ is accepted as the nearest equivalent term to *darsana*. Indian philosophy spells out supreme goals of human life as *purusarthas*. Indian Philosophy expects the seekers after truth to lead a life of renunciation. The seers assert that it is possible to eliminate pain all together and enjoy a life of bliss, *ananda*. Hence they are seriously concerned with *sat*, existence which is the truth also, *cit* (consciousness), and *ananda* (everlasting happiness). While explaining the state of liberation, *mukti*, some thinkers advocate *jivan mukti*, liberation while alive and *videha mukti*, liberation after the disintegration of body and soul. As salvation becomes the salient feature of Indian philosophy it is more optimistic and treats life as having a brighter side. The law of karma, is based on the scientific law that all actions have equal and opposite reactions and on the famous adage, ‘As you sow, so you reap.’ Religion, an important branch of philosophy, also plays a vital role in Indian thought. On par with Western philosophy, Indian philosophy also has dealt deeply with political ideologies, social doctrines,

linguistic analysis, aesthetic explanations, cultural heritage and encompasses all the basic features of life.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Metaphysics: Branch of Philosophy dealing with 'being.'

Epistemology: Theory of knowledge, dealing with meaning of knowledge, process of attaining valid knowledge and certitude of knowledge

Darsana: Indian term used generally to mean 'Philosophy.' Literally it means 'seeing' or 'having a glimpse' of truth.

Purusarthas: Supreme goals of human life, like wealth, pleasure, righteousness and liberation.

1.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 INTRODUCTION TO VEDAS AND UPANISADS

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- 2.8 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit – is to present a general outline of the origin and development of Vedic literature and its epistemological position in the different philosophical schools of India. Vedas have been held as the primary source of a structured society that is believed to pave way for a religious growth and induce a philosophical quest. The various concepts and doctrines of the Vedas can find its relevance in today's world. In this unit, we shall briefly analyze the Vedic literature and its concepts.

By the end of this unit you should be able:

- to gain a general idea of the vast Vedic literature and their content
- to understand the historical growth of religious practices in the Vedic background
- to learn the important concepts that led to the rise of Indian Philosophical systems
- to grasp the relevant concepts of the Vedas and appreciate its relevance in the modern world.

2.1 VEDAS AND ITS CONTENTS

Vedas or the source of knowledge, is also referred to as the *Sruti* or that which is heard, *Apauruseya* or that which is not authored by a human, and *Shastra* or that which serves as a guide through its teaching. The words 'Agama' and 'Amnaya' are synonyms of the Veda. Since

Veda is considered as a revelation it is termed as the 'primary' source of knowledge. The content of the Vedas that has come down to us for centuries is said to have been heard by the sages in deep meditation and these sages are therefore known as '*mantradrastas*' or the 'seer of the mantras'. They transmitted this received knowledge orally to the next generation. Thus, in a generation of oral transmission, the Vedas are preserved. Though we have lost many of the Vedic mantras, we have managed to preserve this tradition to some extent. Moreover, the orally transmitted vedic mantras were made available in writing too and the oldest available written literature is considered to be the Rig Veda. Even though the written or printed material is not considered as the preservation of the Vedic tradition, since oral practise alone is the method to preserve the Vedas, however, the written records give a wider scope for analysis of the historical development of the Vedic tradition. Let us now briefly see the content of the Vedas.

The word 'Veda' generally refers to 'Mantras' and 'Brahmanas'. Mantras are hymns in praise of gods who are invoked in a ritual and Brahmanas are those portions which give various instructions on the performance of rituals. Based on this, Veda is said to be of two kinds, Mantras and Brahmanas. An anthology of mantras is known as 'Samhitas' and the Brahmana portions are an elaboration and are treated as the commentary to the Samhita portions. The Brahmana portions are further divided into three, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanisads. The Brahmana portions primarily teach the nature of ritual (*yaga*) and thus the word Brahmana also means '*yajna*' (ritual). The Aranyakas are so named because it deals with meditation which are generally taken up while living in forest (*aranya*). The Upanisads reveal the Absolute Truth, which provides the means to liberation and is popularly known as the 'Vedanta'. Primarily the source with the four portions, namely, Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and the Upanisad is known as the Veda. But popularly the ritualistic and meditative portions (or at times only the ritualistic portions) came to be known as Veda and the philosophical discovery in the Upanisads got a distinct identity. Therefore, we say, the Veda and Upanisads. (But upanisads are also part of the Vedas.)

As to the historical data of the origin and development of the Vedas, we have many divided views among the historians and researchers, however here we provide a particular view.

1. Age of the Rig Veda Samhita (2500 to 1500 B.C)
2. Age of the Later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanisads (1500 to 500 B.C)

Veda is one source with three forms and this is often referred to as '*Veda Trayi*' or Three Vedas. The Rig, the Yajur and the Sama – are the three Vedas. In such references, the meaning of the Veda refers to the 'creation' and the three Vedas means the threefold creation of *Agni* or Fire (Rig), *Vayu* or Air (Yajur) and *Aditya* or Sun (*Sama*). The '*Atharva*' refers to the '*soma*' or the essence without which the above three cannot survive. The popular view is that the Sage Vyasa segregated the Vedic hymns, that is, the mantra-samhitas into four, viz., Rig Samhita, Yajur-Samhita, Sama-Samhita and Atharva-Samhita and thus we say there are four Vedas.

For a Vedic ritual to take place, it requires four *Rtviks* (roughly translated as Priests). They are:

- i) *Hota* – one who invokes the deity of a particular ritual by employing the invocatory hymns as found in the Rig-Samhitas and the collections of such hymns is referred to as Rig Veda. This is said to have been taught by Vyasa to Pela.
- ii) *Adhvaryu* – one who performs the rituals as enjoined and the relevant mantras are in the Yajur-Samhita and the collection of this is known as Yajurveda which was taught to Vaimshampayana by Vyasa.
- iii) *Udgatha* – one who sings in high intonation and maintains the rhythm of chanting as given in Samaveda and this is taught by Vyasa to Jaimini.
- iv) *Brahma* – one who takes care of the entire proceedings of the ritual and suggests compensatory acts in case of omissions and commissions and this was taught to Sumantu by Vyasa.

Thus, the four Vedas were propagated through these four disciples of Vyasa.

2.2 A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE VEDIC LITERATURE

We shall briefly deal with the Vedic literature and their contents beginning from the Rig Veda. Each Veda, as we had already mentioned, consists of four portions, namely, Samhita, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads. Here, we shall deal with these four portions of each Veda in a nutshell.

Rig Veda:

The word '*Rig*' means praise or eulogy. The collection of Rig is known as Rig Veda. It is set in metrical form. The Rig is considered as the oldest record of revelations and the language of the *Rig* is considered as the most ancient.

There are five branches of Rig-Samhita and they are:

1. *Shakala*
2. *Vaskala*
3. *Ashvalayana*
4. *Samkhya* and
5. *Mandakayana*

Rig-Samhita contains *Suktas* and *Mandalas*. *Sukta* means that which has been received from a reliable source and it is of four types:

- a. *Richi Sukta*: a collection of hymns revealed through the Sages
- b. *Devata Sukta*: a collection of hymns in praise of gods

- c. *Chanda Sukta*: a collection of hymns in the same metrical form and
- d. *Artha Sukta*: a collection of hymns, wherein the meaning of the mantras gets concluded.

The Mandalas are the sections of the Rig-Samhita. There are ten Mandalas with fifty *anuvakas* or sub-sections which contain *suktas*. The *suktas* in turn contain the *mantras*. The two Brahmanas and Aranyakas of the Rig that are available are: Aitareya Brahmana and Shankyayana Brahmana; Aitareya Aranyaka and Shankyayana Aranyaka. The popular Upanisads of the Rig are Kausitaki and Aitareya upanisads.

Yajurveda:

It is widely popular with varied descriptions of the yajna or rituals and is found in prose form. There are two divisions of Yajur, namely Krishna Yajurveda and Shukla Yajurveda. The Krishna Yajur is a combination of mantras and brahmanas, whereas, the Shukla Yajur is predominantly mantra portions. Of the fifty branches of Krishna Yajur, we have today only four branches (Taittiriya, Maitrayani, Katha and Kapilashtakatha). The Shukla Yajur is further divided into Madhyandina branch and Kanva branch. There is only a slight difference in the rendering of the contents of these two branches of Shukla Yajurveda. The famous available brahmana of the Krishna Yajurveda is the Taittiriya Brahmana and that of Shukla Yajur is Shatapatha Brahmana. The main Aranyaka portions of the Yajurveda are Taittiriya Aranyaka and Brihadaranyaka (also contains upanisadic portions). The widely read Upanisads of the Krishna Yajurveda are Kathopanisad and Taittiriyopanisad. The upanisads of the Shukla Yajurveda are Brihadaranayka and the Ishopaniasad.

Samaveda:

The Samaveda is the Rig Veda set in musical form. The Samaveda consists of two predominant parts, viz., the Archika part and the Ganam part. The Archika part is that which consists of meanings of the words and it is a collection of Rks. It is further divided into Purva Archika and Uttara Archika. The Purva Archika consists of six chapters and is divided into four parts as:

1. Agneya parva (consists of mantras related to Agni)
2. Aindra parva (consists of mantras related to Indra)
3. Pavamana parva (with mantras related to Soma) and
4. Aranyakas (on meditations)

The Uttara Archika is with nine chapters with various divisions that primarily deals with the practice of various rituals. The three main branches of Samaveda are Kauthuma branch, Ranayaniya branch and Jaiminiya branch.

The various intonations and method of singing in different pitches are mentioned in detail in the Samaveda. The musical form is broadly divided into four kinds:

- a. Veyaganam – the first five chapters of Purva-Archika are sung in Veyaganam.
- b. Aranyakaganam – The mantras of the Aranyaka portion are sung in Aranyakaganam.
- c. Oohaganam and d. Oohyaganam are the musical pattern of the Uttara-Archika portions.

Some of the important Sama-Brahmanas are Daivatam, Vamshabrahmanam, Tandyam etc. The available one Aranyaka of Samaveda is the Talavakara-Aranyaka. At the end of the Talavakara we find the Kenopanisad. The Chandogyopanisad also belongs to Samaveda.

Atharvaveda:

The Atharvaveda consists of nine branches and we have only two such branches available, namely, the Shaunaka branch and the Pippalada branch. There are three Samhitas of the Atharva, namely, Aashi, Acharya and Vidhiprayoga Samhitas. The only available Brahmana of the Atharvaveda is the Gopatha Brahmanam. It consists of two parts, Purvagopatha and Uttaragopatha. So far, we have not found any Aranyaka of the Atharvaveda. The three prominent upanisads of the Atharva are Prashnupanisad, Mundakopanisad and Mandukyopanisad.

Commentators of the Vedas:

The celebrated commentator of the Vedas, especially, the Brahmana portions is Sayana. Some of the other important commentators to various portions of the Veda like, Samhita, Aranyakas etc., are Skandasvami, Narayana, Madhavabhata, Venkatamadhava, Anandatirtha, Uvvata, Halayudha, Ananta and others. The commentaries help us in understanding the import of the Vedic words. The commentators reveal the changing conditions in their interpretative commentaries.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Give a brief outline of the Vedas and its Contents.

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- 2) Give an account of the Vedic Literature and Its Commentators.

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2.3. SOME IMPORTANT VEDIC CONCEPTS - I

Now, we shall briefly embark upon the varied topics found in the four portions of the Vedas and then derive certain important concepts that serve as the foundation of Vedic Religion and Philosophy.

Samhitas:

In the Rig-Mandalas, we find mention of many worldly affairs especially related to human life. Various aspects like the earliest mention on marriage and ancestral worship is seen in the Rig. The importance of charity (*dana*) is highlighted in the Rig-Suktas. Some of the thought-provoking and paradoxical suktas of the Rig Veda are Nasadiya Sukta (10-129), Purushasukta (10-90), Hiranyagarbha Sukta (10-121) etc. The Yajur-Samhitas prescribe the procedures for performance of daily and occasional duties of an individual. The Atharva-Samhitas mark the beginning of ancient ruling and administration. There are descriptions of many actions like conquering an enemy, gaining wealth etc. We find discussion on Science especially on medicine, disease and cure. The Ayushya-Sukta of Atharva is quite well-known for it is the prayer for long healthy life.

Brahmanas:

By the time the Brahmana part of the Vedas developed the society has undergone a well-defined stratification with a common goal. In this period, performance of rituals for the individual and total benefit dominated the scene that was based on the Vedic designation in the form of *varna* (class) and *ashrama* (stage of life). The ritual or the *yajna* symbolises an integrated personality for a harmonious life. In a ritual, there are two types of oblations, one is the thought at the mental level and the other is the speech. The thought alone is expressed as the speech in a ritual and the same holds good in life too which aids in a harmonious living.

Aranyakas:

In the development of Aranyaka portions, we find well-defined concepts of Time. There is the mention of the transcendental and the empirical time, where the empirical time slot is compared to the perennial flow of waters. There is a description of various seasons and their effects on the health of living beings. The importance of study of one's own scripture and fivefold compulsory acts (*pancha-mahayajna*) are found in this portion. The fivefold compulsory acts are: worship of gods, worship of lineage of teachers, worship of ancestors, service to humanity and service to the animal and plant kingdom. We find here the description of meditation on *prana* or vital breath. Since this portion primarily concentrates on bringing about a serene mind, varieties of *vratas* or vows are prescribed. The Upanisads deal with the philosophical enquiry into the nature of the ultimate truth and reveal the liberating knowledge. We shall deal with the Upanisads a little later in this unit.

Vedic gods:

The hymns in praise of various deities have given rise to polytheism, henotheism and gradually to monotheism. The gods are presiding deities of various powers of natural forces. The primary gods mentioned in the Vedas are 33 gods, that is, 8 *Vasus*, 11 *Rudras*, 12 *Adityas* and 2 *Ashvinis*. The presiding deity of all gods is said to be *Indra*. The importance of all the gods led to polytheistic tendency. But, gradually, there rose the need to provide importance to one deity and thus lord of all beings was described as *PrajaPati*. Later, in the Upanisads we find the one absolute termed as *Brahman*.

2.4. SOME IMPORTANT VEDIC CONCEPTS - II

Here, we shall analyze some five specific important concepts that we derive from the above mentioned varied topics of the Vedas. The following concepts have served as the strong foundation for Indian Thinking and have highly influenced the religious and philosophical domains.

Sat and Asat

The fundamental quest of any thinking mind is to arrive at the prime cause of this vast multifarious creation. The Vedic seers had tried to find answers and have presented them in a riddled language. In this connection, the concept of *Sat* (Existent principle) and *Asat* (Non-existent principle) are described. We find statements in the Veda that say, ‘there was *Sat* prior to the creation’ and there is another statement that says ‘there was *Asat* prior to the creation’. Such statements have given rise to various theories on the cause of creation. For instance, some consider that prior to creation there must be a *sat* principle, an existent principle since from an existing thing alone something can originate. Others hold the view that if there had been *sat* prior to creation, there will be the difficulty in stating the cause of that *sat*, hence it is said ‘nothing’ (*asat*) was there before creation. Now, these two fundamental concepts of ‘*Sat*’ and ‘*Asat*’ gave rise to divided opinions which formed the foundation of Indian Philosophical systems in later period.

Mutual Triad

Another important concept is the mutual triad that has been derived in the Vedas based on the observation of Nature and its reaction. The simple concept derived from nature is the cyclic process in a chain and disturbance in any part of the chain ruins the entire process gradually or immediately. Based on this vital observation, the Vedas present the mutual triads, that is, the *adhyatmika* (individual), *adhibhautika* (the universe) and *adhidaivika* (the presiding principle). For instance let us take the five sense organs of knowledge and understand them at these three levels.

<i>Adhyatmika</i>	<i>Adhibhautika</i>	<i>Adhidaivika</i>
Eye (sense of sight)	Sense objects of colour	Surya (Sun)
Ear (sense of sound)	Sense objects of sound	Dik (God of Directions)

Skin (sense of touch)	Sense objects of touch, like hard, soft etc.	Vayu (Air)
Tongue (sense of taste)	Sense objects of taste, like sweet, sour etc	Varuna (Waters)
Nose (sense of smell)	Sense objects of smell, like fragrance of rose etc.	Asvinis (Twin-gods)

For knowledge to take place, we need a functioning sense organs at the individual level, there must be the sense objects available in the external world, and also the need for the grace of the presiding deities. Only when this triad mutually functions, the knowledge of the world is gained. This concept of triad forms the basis of religious faith and practices.

Law of *Karma*

Another vital doctrine that evolved from the Vedas is the Law of *Karma*. It is initially referred to as '*Rta*' or the cosmic order and later termed as '*Satya*' or the invariable Truth. Further, it came to be widely known by the word '*Karma*'. *Karma* refers to both action and result of action. It works on certain universal principles, according to the Vedas. That is, every action gives result and every result is reaped through various experiences. The concept of *Dharma* is the primary determinant of *karma*. Hence, we find lot of importance given to *dharma* in the Vedas. The *Karma* and *Dharma* are inseparable factors of the rhythmic flow of the universe and all its beings. The ethical and moral codes come under *dharma* and the performance of the moral codes (as prescribed or its violation, that is, *dharma* and *adharma*) comes under *karma*. Here too a cyclic process is indicated wherein one performs *karma*, reaps *karma phala* (result) and that again leads to performance of *karma*. This chain, is said to continue not only in the present birth but is a chain with countless past births and future births. Thus, we have the theory of transmigration.

Theory of Transmigration

According to this theory, an individual being under the law of *karma*, assumes different physical bodies, that is, takes several births. This concept of the Vedas is imbedded in every religious act and ritual. An individual constantly tries to remove the past accumulated *adharma* (demerit) and seeks to nourish *dharma* (merit) in the present birth, which is believed to determine the future birth. The religion focuses on a *dharmic* living to ensure a safe future birth, whereas, the philosophers seek to exit from the cycle of births and deaths.

Vedic Designation

Apart from the religious and philosophical fervour, the Vedic society is also designed with a hope for a harmonious living. In this view, the Veda suggests the classification of a society based on the aptitude (*guna*) and profession (*karma*) of an individual, which is known as *Varna*. The

other classification is based on the stage of life an individual passes through and it is known as *Ashrama*.

Vedas visualises the aptitude of the individuals broadly as four: knowledge-oriented, action-oriented (which is again in three ways, action for protection and administration and action for trading and commerce) service-oriented with skilled and semi-skilled actions. These four broad aptitudes are essential for any society and these aptitudes when designed into a profession, their functioning would take care of the individual interest and the interest of the society at large. The Vedas groups this as *varna* and names them as *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* respectively. But, unfortunately in the fading of the Vedas, the vision of the Vedas too diminished and took the cruel form of caste system by which we are unable to free ourselves even in this 21st century.

From the stand of the different stages of life, again the Vedas classifies them into four, as the student-life (*Brahmacharyam*), married-life (*Grhastham*), retired-life (*Vanaprastham*) and mendicant-life (*Sanyasam*). These four are known as *Ashramas*. The four stages need not be compulsory; depending on the aptitude of an individual one may move from the first *ashrama* to the third or at times to the fourth. The dharma and karma prescribed in the *varna-ashrama* scheme vary which take care of the general duties and the specific duties, thus making the concept of dharma more complex and complicated.

2.5 UPANISADS

The Upanisads are the prime source of many philosophical conclusions. The word Upanisad can be split as *upa+ni+sat*; to mean '*upa*' – approaching a teacher; '*ni*' – for knowledge; '*sat*' – to attain liberation. Of more than 1180 upanisads, the popular and widely studied are the ten Upanisads, namely, Isa, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya and Brihdaranyaka. We shall briefly see the important doctrines as found in these upanisads.

The Upanisads present Brahman as the absolute reality and the substratum of the universe. Brahman is revealed as both the material and intelligent cause of the universe. Upanisads employ two ways of defining Brahman, one in its own nature (*svarupa lakshana*), that is, Brahman as the Consciousness, Existent and Bliss principle. The second definition is from its accidental attributes (*tatastha lakshana*) wherein Brahman is shown as the substratum of origination, sustenance and resolution of the universe. Various methodologies are used by the Upanisads to arrive at the absolute reality and one such method we find in the Aitareya Upanisad is known as superimposition and negation (*adhyaropa* and *apavada*). The world and its objects are superimposed initially and after the revelation of the non-difference between the effect and its material cause, the world is negated as non-existent in the substratum. Further, there is the description of the world, the individual self and the creator of the universe in the Upanisads. The method of moving from the gross to the subtle is employed in the Taittiriya Upanisad. Here, the nature of self is analysed beginning from the gross physical body leading to the subtlest Consciousness. Some important images like the chariot and bow-arrow, are presented in

Kathopanisad and Mundakopanisad respectively. The Upanisads uniformly present the triple means to a seeker of truth, they are, listening to the scriptures (*shravana*), pondering on the teaching so as to remove doubts and misconceptions (*manana*) and dwelling on the teaching (*nididhyasana*). Mostly, the Upanisads are set in a dialogue between a teacher and a disciple and the teaching is gradual and progressive. The various Upanisads consistently deal with one subject-matter of that absolute truth.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Examine some of the Basic Concepts of the Vedas that influenced the religious and philosophical thinking of India.

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- 2) What is the role of the Upanisads? Give an outline of the contents of the Upanisads.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

Vedas or the source of knowledge, is also referred to as the *Sruti*. The content of the Vedas that has come down to us for centuries is said to have been heard by the sages in deep meditation and these sages are therefore known as '*mantradrastas*' or the 'seer of the mantras'. The word 'Veda' generally refers to 'Mantras' and 'Brahmanas'. Mantras are hymns in praise of gods who are invoked in a ritual and Brahmanas are those portions which give various instructions on the performance of rituals. The Aranyakas deals with meditation which is generally taken up while living in forest (*aranya*). The Upanisads reveal the Absolute Truth, which provides the means to liberation and is popularly known as the 'Vedanta.' The Vedic Literature is vast with several branches and sections. The Vedic concepts and doctrines have highly influenced the religious and philosophical thinking of India. Some of the concepts are the definition of *Sat* and *Asat*. The most influential concepts are the law of karma and the concept of dharma that reflect the social condition of Vedic period.

The Upanisads employ two ways of defining Brahman, one in its own nature (*svarupa lakshana*), that is, Brahman as the Consciousness, Existent and Bliss principle. The second definition is

from its accidental attributes (*tatastha lakshana*) wherein Brahman is shown as the substratum of origination, sustenance and resolution of the universe. The Upanisads uniformly present the triple means to a seeker of truth; they are, *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*. Mostly, the Upanisads are set in a dialogue between a teacher and a disciple and the teaching is gradual and progressive.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Veda:	source of knowledge
Samhita:	a collection of mantras or <i>suktas</i>
Brahmana:	that portion which prescribes rules and regulations for rituals
Aranyaka:	it gives the detail of meditations
Upanisad:	it conducts a philosophical quest

2.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 INTRODUCTION TO TIRUKKURAL

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Philosophical Insights of *Tirukkural*
 - 3.3 Moral Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar
 - 3.4 Social Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar
 - 3.5 Political Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar
 - 3.6 Let us Sum up
 - 3.7 Key Words
 - 3.8 Further Readings and References
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

As objective scholars on Indian philosophy would vouch for a fact that Indian culture is not built upon only one tradition. Neither monopoly of one religious tradition within India nor of one linguistic tradition would be acceptable in the plurality of Indian traditions. Sources of Indian philosophy are spread about many religious, philosophical and moral treatises, both written and oral, in various ancient languages like Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil. Apart from the stereotyped treatment on dwelling only on Sanskrit tradition for Indian philosophical thoughts, this unit emphatically proclaims the deep philosophical insights embedded in classical Tamil text called *Tirukkural*. The objective of this unit is to bring out the moral, social and political philosophy of *Tirukkural*. The unit would mostly avoid the introductory details about the text and concentrate fully on its philosophical insights for want of space. Such a brief introduction on *Tirukkural* could be found in the unit on ancient Dalit thinkers in one of the elective courses of IGNOU MA philosophy under the title, Dalit philosophy. The numbers given within bracket in the sentences of this unit refer to the number of couplet of *Tirukkural*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

‘*Tirukkural*’ etymologically means the ‘holy couplets,’ i.e. a text having two lines with seven words each in the Tamil poetic ‘*venba*’ metre. It has 1330 couplets with 133 chapters each containing 10 couplets. Tiruvalluvar did not write autobiography nor any authentic biographies are available there is no perfect life-sketch of Tiruvalluvar. A few information about his life are passed on orally. He lived at Mylapore, Chennai, engaged in weaving as his profession, married to a maid known as Vasuki. Certain events that are purported to have taken place in his life seem to be unbelievable. *Tirukkural* is a moral compendium which has been classified under three major headings; *aram* (righteousness), *porul* (wealth), *ibam* (enjoyment). The ideological implication of these titles is that one must earn wealth through righteous means and enjoyment becomes imminent through that which leads to enlightenment. This view is similar to the Sanskrit tradition of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*.

3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS OF TIRUKKURAL

Tiruvalluvar's philosophy is that of common man and hence he developed his ideals in such a manner that man ought to live as a true human being and cherish all the human values, promote earthly virtues, establish social harmony, engage in domestic life, follow political ideologies, develop mutual assistance, adhere to the life of renunciation, enjoy all kinds of pleasures, contemplate deeply on a few metaphysical issues etc.

In the invocatory chapter known as 'the Praise of God,' Tiruvalluvar glorifies the significant features of God: He is the ancient Lord or the Supreme Being; Lord with perfect intelligence; Flower decked God; He who has transcended likes and dislikes; *Iraivan* – the protector of the universe; unparalleled Lord; the embodiment of righteousness; Lord endowed with Eight attributes; He who has annihilated the onslaught of the senses; the great controller of the living beings.

Nowhere does the author mention the Lord with his specific name, probably to teach mankind about the relationship between God, human beings and the world. Had he mentioned the name of God, then people would think that the moral philosophy of Tiruvalluvar is based on the preachings of that particular religion whose God's name has been mentioned. Since Tiruvalluvar wanted to establish a society where people belonging to all religious sects should lead a peaceful and harmonious life, he had explicated the need of monotheistic divinity. Still scholars taking into consideration few religious expressions found in the couplets proclaim that such expressions unequivocally indicate their God and therefore Tiruvalluvar belongs to their religious cult and his moral thought are pertaining to their religion. If Tiruvalluvar is confined to a particular religion, then the universalistic outlook of his moral ideologies would be misnomer.

In the chapter on "The Dread of Beggary," he explains: If the Supreme Lord who has created this world has destined that man should continue to live through begging, then let that Lord wander about the world and perish." (1062). In this verse Tiruvalluvar links the life of penury and poverty leading to the act of begging and the person who is responsible for this degradation and curses Him to go away from this world. Thus Tiruvalluvar wants to behold that mankind should have a self-contained life. Tiruvalluvar has mentioned the fact that the universe has been created by God.

Tiruvalluvar deliberately did not write anything about *moksa* or liberation. Probably, he might have thought that life on this earth is to be lived perfectly and honestly than contemplating upon life beyond death. According to the commentators, since *moksa* is concerned with a blissful state of experience, it cannot be explained in adequate terms. As such there are no authentic reports about the state of liberation, but many theoretical accounts are available through revelations of the mystic saints. Hence Tiruvalluvar might have thought that any one who is virtuous in his domestic, social, political and moral spheres, he will certainly experience abundant joy in every aspect of life, *veedu peru*. The *kama* or *inbam* (pleasure) described by Tiruvalluvar in the third section is to be understood in terms of leading to the everlasting and increasing bliss. At the worldly level we have physical pleasure and mental happiness, but at the spiritual plane, which is mystic in nature and essence, the rapture is to be experienced rather than explained. Hence

,Tiruvalluvar wants every human being to concentrate on the life on earth than contemplating on a heavenly life.

Another interesting feature of this famous text is that its author has not used anywhere the terms such as Tamil language, Tamilian, Tamil country, though all the 1330 couplets are in chaste Tamil language. There are totally 9310 Tamil words used in this work. In the first couplet itself Tiruvalluvar resorts to his intention of spreading his message for mankind: “The world of sound commences with the letter ‘A’. Similarly all that exists in the world commence from the Prime Mover.”

In several places the author uses the expressions like ‘*ulaku*’ ‘*ulakam*’ ‘*vaiyam*’ ‘*jñalam*’ etc., to refer to the world. His love for mankind and fascination to find out man as living as a genuine human, without social discrimination, linguistic fanaticism, racial inequalities, political turmoils, religious fundamentalism, moral disturbances, mental imbalances, regional dissimilarities, national prejudices, economic upheaval, geographical divisions etc., are found in every couplet. He delves deeply on almost all the aspects of human life. At several places he indicates that man should not live through the senses which is nothing but the life of brutish beasts. He expects man to use his sixth sense viz., mind to sort out all human issues and lead a life of spirituality which will bring forth a life of tranquility and solace to all human woes. In preface to his translation of *Tirukkural* VVS Aiyar states, “Tiruvalluvar has given to the world a work to which, in perfection of form, profundity of thought, nobleness of sentiment, and earnestness of moral purpose...”

The last section of this grand work deals exclusively with the various aspects of domestic life especially the inner part of it known as conjugal love, He divides this section into two divisions, first speaks about pre-marital love and the second about married life. This shows that the ancient Tamils have developed grammar not only for the external life of human beings, but also for the internal living.

3.3 MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF TIRUVALLUVAR

Very cleverly Tiruvalluvar refers to virtue in two different but similar terms, viz., *aram* and *aran*. The title of the chapter is emphasis on *aran* which means the glorification of righteousness. The subtle difference between these two terms is that *aram* means the definition of virtue. For instance, avoidance of jealousy, greediness, wrath and abusive language is the best way to acquire *aram* (35). As contrast he reiterates that domestic life is exclusively that is practiced as *aran*: life not blamed by others but earning good name (49). When abundant love and *aran* prevail at home, they are the quality and benefit of family life (45). Promoting purity of heart without any blemish whatsoever is the best way of living; the other so called *aran* are nothing but empty display (34). However both these terms viz., *aram* and *aran* indicate virtue, the former is used to refer to the definition of righteousness, while the former its fulfillment or utility. However, one can notice the difficulty of the author is not giving a positive meaning or definition of righteousness. The Absence of certain ignorable traits such as anger, jealousy etc., is to be understood as *aram*.

In the life of a man his individual life, socio-political life, romantic life are playing a vital life. The first section is pertaining to individual ethics, with the sub-divisions such as domestic virtue, ascetic virtue and fate. The second section is concerned with political ethics which has the true meaning, *poral* of life. It has the headings of royalty, ministers of state and appendix. The third section pertains to conjugal love with the pre-marital love and wedded love as the divisions. The first section ends with the chapter on fate. Man has to live in accordance to his destiny. 'Although a man may study the most polished treatises, the knowledge which fate has decreed to him will still prevail.' (373). There are through fate two different nature in the world, hence the difference observable in men in their acquisition of wealth in their attainment of knowledge. There seems to be a contradiction in the conception of fate by Tiruvalluvar. In this chapter he holds that 'what is stronger than fate? If we think of an expedient to avert it, it will itself be with us before the time ought. (380). However in the chapter on manly effort he maintains that 'they will labour on, without fear and without fainting will see even fate out behind their back.' (620). In the first one the author gives a generic truth that fate is more powerful and difficult to overcome. In the other couplet he gives a specific truth that if one strive with undismayed and unfaltering mind that person will curtail the impact of fate. Hence one should not keep inactive leaving everything to destiny.

The second section ends with the chapter on baseness, *kayamai*. The contents of this chapter reveal the truth that even during the time of Tiruvalluvar the society has been degraded. In any social setting if there the vile people with malevolent attitude and highly despicable character predominate, then naturally that society would lose respect. Tiruvalluvar uses highly contemptuous language to describe the attitude of the degenerates. It would be very difficult to distinguish between the men of base and honest people since the base resemble the celestials; for they act as they like. The principle of behavior in the mean is chiefly fear; if not, hope of gain, to some extent. The great bestow their alms as soon as they are informed; but the mean, like the sugar-cane, only when they are tortured to death. The base will hasten to sell themselves as soon as a calamity has befallen them. For what else are they gifted? Thus it is clear that the individuals have to promote all noble traits so that the socio-political organizations would be free from the highly despicable men.

Though Tiruvalluvar's primary concern is to make mankind perfect and virtuous through various means, he seems to be a lover of nature. In the chapter of the excellence of Rain, he glorifies the importance of rain, water, sky, celestials, food, ploughing, clouds, annual festivals, daily worship, penance, almsgiving, duties of life which are basically related with water. The method of water management formulated by Tiruvalluvar shows his human concern. 'By the continuance of rain, the world is preserved in existence; it is therefore worthy to be called ambrosia.(11). Further, if it be said that the duties of life cannot be discharged by anyone without water, so also without rain no flowing water is possible. (20).

One such famous chapter in the *Tirukkural* is 'the greatness of the Ascetics' wherein the author asserts the ultimate goal of life through ethical discipline mingled with renunciation. All treatises in the world uniformly emphasise the greatness of those who abide by the code of conduct unique to their state of existence who have relinquished all desires. It is not possible to describe the measure of those who have renounced. If done so, it would be like counting the dead. Those who have realized the importance of the two-fold nature of existence will excel

others. He who controls his five senses by the look of wisdom will be a seed in the world of heaven.

Indiran, the Lord of the celestial is the best example for strengthening his will by way of controlling the five senses. Only the men of wisdom can achieve greatness, while the men of mean mindedness can seldom achieve. He who knows the qualities of taste, sight, touch, audition and smell alone can abide by the intricacies of the world. The greatness of the men of efficient knowledge through hidden language can be revealed by their inspiring utterances. It would be impossible to resist the wrath even for a moment of those who have scaled the mountain of goodness. The *Andhanars* are none other than the men of virtues since they show kindness to all living species.

The moral philosophy of Tiruvalluvar is found in all the sections such as domestic virtues, ascetic virtues, fate, royal virtues, appendix etc. The individual virtues which are essentially ethical are associated with social and political morality since both these institutions are meant for promoting the welfare of the individuals. Life starts with love. As a essential feature of all aspects of life is love. Since love is related to virtue, Tiruvalluvar maintains that virtue will burn up the human person which is devoid of love even as the Sun burns up the creature which is without bones, (worms). (77) Most of the problems emerge due to the usage of abusive language. Tiruvalluvar insists that one should always utter pleasant words and should refrain from using filthy language. Here also Tiruvalluvar combines the notion of virtue. The sins of a man will vanish and the virtues increase provided he cultivates the habit of speaking sweet words (88). We should also not forget the favour received from some one since gratitude is related to the knowledge of benefits conferred. He who has annihilated every virtue may yet survive; there is no redemption for him who has killed a benefit. (110).

Impartiality is a moral virtue which expects all human beings to treat others like themselves which is especially applicable to the merchants. The ornament of the wise is not to deviate from impartiality and maintain balance like the ever-fixed scale. (119). One must possess self-restriction to lead a peaceful life. Like the tortoise one must control the five senses; the role of a man with self-restriction is greater than mountain. All problems emerge due to the non-control of tongue and hence one must guard his tongue. Discipline and decorum are very essential for a human being since they are treated greater than life. Propriety of conduct is the seed of virtue; impropriety will ever cause sorrow (138). Not coveting another's wife, the possession of patience or forbearance, not envying, not coveting, not back biting, the not speaking of profitless words, the dread of evil deeds, the knowing of what is suitable for a man's status, offering, fame are some of the virtues associated with family life.

In the ascetic virtues we have the following chapters; The possession of benevolence, the relinquishing of meat, penance, inconsistent conduct, the absence of fraud, veracity, the not being angry, non-indulgence of evil, non-killing, instability, renunciation, knowledge of the true, the extirpation of desire and fate. Among the above topics, the term '*vaymai*' is significant in the sense that it is equated with truth commonly. But Tiruvalluvar gives a unique definition of '*vaymai*' thus; '*veracity*' is nothing but non-utterance of words causing evil to other. (291). Purity of the external body is caused by water and inner purity is caused by veracity. Now it is clear that unless a person develops inner purity he cannot but resist the usage of abusive words. Only a

man of internal purification will speak in a perfect manner without offending any body. Even falsehood has the nature of veracity, if it brings forth faultless benefit. He who promotes deceitless conduct in his mind certainly dwell in the minds of all. In this context Tiruvalluvar points out the avoidance of falsehood. The faultless lamp of wisdom caused by veracity is the true lamp of the world. To those who eat meat Tiruvalluvar first asks people not to eat meat so that the butchers will not kill animals for the sake of eating meat.

3.4 SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF TIRUVALLUVAR

As it is generally known social ideologies cannot exist and survive without being followed and patronized by individuals. Tiruvalluvar's message for the social well-being of people is found in several couplets. In the chapter on cherishing guests. It is not proper to keep the guests outside his residence even though he were eating the food of immortality. (82). He who having entertained the guests who have visited him, looks out for other guests to visit, will certainly be a welcome guest to the celestial beings. (86). In the section on wealth in association with political thought Tiruvalluvar speaks of social virtues. The process of getting education, non-learning, listening to others, the possession of knowledge, the correction of faults, seeking the guidance of great people, avoidance of mean minded people, acting after realization, knowing the power, knowing the place, knowing the time, clarification with enlightenment, engagement after-realization, cherishing one's kindred, unforgetfulness, unsluggishness, personality endeavours, withstanding in trouble, method of acquiring wealth, friendship, investigation in making friendship, familiarity, evil friendship, unwanted friendship, folly, ignorance, hostility, the might of hatred, knowing the efficiency of enmity, internal enmity, non offending the great, being led by women, wanton women, non drinking of toddy, gambling, medicine, nobility, honour, greatness, perfectness, noble qualities, wealth without benefaction, shamefulfulness, the way of maintaining the family, agriculture, poverty, mendicancy, the dread of mendicancy and baseness.

The literal meaning of the word '*porul*' is wealth. But it also indicates the meaning of life. Tiruvalluvar expects that human beings must live with fellowmen amicably and peacefully. The first and foremost requirement for executing this ideal is education which is the manifestation of perfection already in men. Every one should learn the subject matter without any blemish, and learn selectively, but ultimately his conduct should be worthy of his learning (291). Water will emerge from the sand-well in proportion to the depth to which is dug; likewise knowledge will flow from a man in proportion to his learning. According to Tiruvalluvar illiteracy leads to ignorance and it is a sin. As beasts by the side of men, so are other men by the side of those who are learned in celebrated works. (410). As a method of learning and acquiring knowledge Tiruvalluvar emphasizes the process of listening. In his opinion the wealth of wealth is that which is heard by the ear; that wealth is the major wealth. (411). He condemns the people who tastes the food seriously than tasting the message heard through the ear. (420).

The culmination of education, listening etc, is nothing but the possession of knowledge, leading to wisdom. The frequently quoted verse (423) declares thus; To discover the truth, uttered by any person, listened to by any person, is real wisdom. Most of fear what ought to be feared is folly; it is the work of the wise to fear what should be feared. (428). The noble gesture of the men of wisdom is to correct the faults of fellowmen, as well as in themselves. Those who fear guilt, if they commit a faulty small as a millet seed, will consider it to be as large as a palmyra

tree (433). In a society none can decide anything individually. Seeking the aid of great men is essentially required for guidance and decision making. This quality is to be preferred by the rulers. So to act as to make those men, his own, who are greater than himself is of all powers the highest (444). To achieve this welcome virtue one must avoid the company of the mean minded fellows. This is no greater help than the company of the good. There is no greater source of sorrow than the company of the wicked. (460)

No action should be performed in haste but after due consideration of the pros and cons of that action. Tiruvalluvar insists that before engaging in an action one should contemplate seriously and then proceed. After having undertaken it, to say, "we will consider" is a stupid way of talking, (467), one must realize his power and ability before executing an action. Even if the peacock feathers are loaded excessively, the axle of that vehicle will break (475). Equally one must realize the appropriate time while performing an act. If a person acts in the right time and at the right place, he can conquer the world and accomplish it (484). Similarly is the case in knowing the right place for action. Tiruvalluvar substantiates this view: Wide chariots with mighty wheels will not turn on the ocean; neither will the ships that traverse ocean, move on the earth (496). One must know and realize the conditions of life which are based on righteousness, wealth, pleasure and fear of life (death). For trusting a fellow without examination and doubting a fellow after choosing for the assignment, both will create irremediable sorrow. (510). Similarly one should realize and employ right person for right action. After having considered, 'this man can accomplish this, by these means,' let the master leave with him in the discharge of that duty. There is a famous proverb in Tamil – 'living with kith and kin will fetch crores of benefits.' Tiruvalluvar in a decade extols the greatness of cherishing one's kindred. Even when a man's property is lost, his relatives will move with him with their accustomed kindness. Though people consider forgetting as a boon, Tiruvalluvar on the contrary wants the people not to develop the habit of forgetting. For forgetfulness will destroy one's name and fame, even as constant poverty destroys knowledge, (532).

Benignity is a grand virtue. For kind looks are the ornaments of the eyes. Those who devise to cultivate that degree of civilization which all shall prefer, even after swallowing the poison served to them by their friends; such persons will be friendly even with them. (580). Tiruvalluvar also insists upon developing strength and energy to fulfill one's mission on earth. With an analogy he elucidates this concept. Even as the flower stretches as per the depth of water, the greatness of human beings will be determined by their mental strength. (588). This virtue is followed by unsluggishness. People are expected to give up idleness and be brisk always. Those who through idleness and do not engage themselves in dignified extension, will subject themselves to troubles and reproaches. (608). Promoting power and untiring activities will culminate in personality development. To encourage people Tiruvalluvar brings in divinity. Even if something could not be achieved by divine sources, one can triumph and obtain the reward through constant labour and continued bodily extensions. (618). Even if fate confronts a man with suffering one should not give up hope. In troubles too one should develop steadfastness and try to wipe out troubles. Such people will give sorrow to sorrow itself who in sorrow do not suffer in sorrows.

3.5 POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TIRUVALLUVAR

Man is a political animal; for peaceful living in a social good governance is a pre-requisite. To protect people from external dangers and internal threats, people need a good state with all equipments. Tiruvalluvar devotes several decades of verses to highlight the salient features of political ideologies.

The section on wealth commences with the significant features of royal personality especially the greatness of a king or ruler. A king has to possess an army, citizens, wealth, ministers, friends and a fortress. Such a king will be treated as a lion among kings. This is the grammar of politics. (381). A ruler must promote the quality of manly modesty and should not swerve from virtue but refrain from Vice (384). The ruler who spends his time and energy with duty consciousness in protecting his subjects will be adored as a God among men. (388). The other virtues elucidated for social well being of people are equally applicable for the king and ministers too. While seeking the guidance of great men, a king must be always in the company of noble men selected by him for the prosperity of his domain. Otherwise, he will perish even though there be no one to defeat or destroy him. (448).

A ruler must be vigilant and always be aware of the power of his army, his enemy etc, before venturing into any act. There is nothing which may not be accomplished by those who, before they attack an enemy, make themselves acquainted with their own ability, and with whatever else is needful to be known, and apply themselves wholly to their goal. (472). Equally is important the intent of knowing the appropriate time. Valluvur explains this virtue with an analogy. A crow will conquer an owl in the day time; thus a king has to analyse the suitable time before conquering his enemies. (481). While selecting the ministers the ruler must be very conscious of their skill and ability. According to Tiruvalluvar, let a minister be chosen, after he has been tried by means of the following four qualities, virtue, attachment towards money, indulgence in sexual pleasure and fear of losing life. (501).

In the chapter on the Right scepter Tiruvalluvar gives a vivid picture about the method of ruling the country. Even as the living beings live happily when there is good down-pouring, the citizens will live happily when the king rules his domain justly. (542). Again for a king to punish the criminals with severe punishments, is like the pulling up of the weeds in the green field. (550). Similarly a king is to avoid the quality of the cruel scepter. The country of the king who does not daily examine into the wrongs done and distribute justice, will daily fall to ruin. (553). Again when the people shed tears unable to bear the torture from a cruel king, on that day itself the wealth of the king will vanish. (555). Another important duty of the ruler is to protect his domain from terrorism. If he could not control and contain the onslaught of the terrorists, Tiruvalluvar warns that peace will be out of focus from his territory. The king should engage detectives to check the activities of the unruly masses and bring forth peace in his country. He is a spy who watches all men, to wit those who are in the king's employment, his relatives and his enemies. (584).

In the sub section on Ministers of state, Tiruvalluvar emphatically asserts the office of the minister of state to assist the smooth administration of the kingdom in association with the king. He is one who is able to comprehend the whole nature of an undertaking, execute it in the best manner possible and offer assuring advice in time of necessity. (634). A minister must have the ability to communicate powerfully so that he can win over the confidence of his master and

fellowmen. It is impossible for any one to conquer him by intriguing who does possess power of oratory and is neither faulty nor timid. (647). Tiruvalluvar elucidates the purity of action, the power of action and the method of acting.

The ruler is expected to maintain good relationship with the neighbouring countries and mutual friendship and territorial integrity are to be preserved. For this purpose the role of the envoy becomes inevitable. Since Tiruvalluvar has realized this necessity in ten couplets he describes the feature of sending emissaries to the neighbouring countries for peaceful co-existence. The qualifications of an ambassador are love of fellowmen, a fitting birth and the possession of abilities being acceptable to royalty. (681). A person who does possess the following virtues alone is eligible to be sent on a mission to foreign countries: an embodiment of wisdom, natural temperament for investigation and excellent learning. (684) The minister is always expected to be in the company of the king and advise him during the time of crisis. An excellent comparison is made by Tiruvalluvar regarding the relationship between the king and the minister. Ministers who serve under the fickle-minded monarchs should be neither too far nor too near like those who warn themselves at the fire. (691). While in the presence of the sovereign, ministers should neither whisper to nor smile at others. (694).

Another essential requirement of a minister is to know through indication. According to Tiruvalluvar, the minister who by looking at the king understands his mind without being told of it will be a perpetual ornament to the world which is surrounded by never drying ocean. (701). The minister also should have a thorough knowledge about the movements of his subordinates. This kind of understanding will enable him to be cautious about the spies and internal dangers. For a to blunder in the presence of those who have acquired a vast store of learning and know the value thereof is like a good man stumbling and falling away from the path of virtue. (781). Also the minister is not expected to exhibit any kind of dread before the council. In order to reply fearlessly before a foreign court, ministers should learn the logical method according to the rules of grammar. (725).

In the sub-division of the essentials of a state Tiruvalluvar first defines what is a state. A state is constituted of perfect cultivation, virtuous persons and merchants with inexhaustible wealth. All these must be good together always. (731). Again, freedom from epidemics, wealth, produce, happiness and protection to subjects are the fine jewels for a country. (738). Tiruvalluvar also portrays the nature of a fort. A fort is that which has an extensive space within, but only small places to be guarded and such as can destroy the courage of the besieging foes. (744). The minister should also know the technique of accumulating wealth. The chief wealth of the king is an well equipped army which completes its mission in the battle field without fear of wounds. (761). The kingdom should be proud about its military spirit. It is more pleasant to hold the dart that has missed an elephant than which has hit a hare in the forest. (772).

Tiruvalluvar brings to light the deep intricacies of masking friendship after proper investigation whom we have to consider as our friends. He wants people to give up evil friendship which may drive people to untold sufferings. He also distinguishes between genuine friendship and unreal friendship. In several couplets he describes various facts about familiarity. Intimate friendship is that which cannot in the least be injured by things done through the right of long standing intimacy. (801). He also elucidates the significant features of folly, ignorance, hostility, the

might of hatred, knowing the ability of hatredness, enmity withing, not offending the great, being led by women, wanton women, not drinking toddy, not indulging in gambling and medicine. In the last chapter the author suggests various means to avoid diseases, the method of treatment, diet etc. Let the physician enquire first into thenature of the discease, its cause and its method of cure and treat a patient faithfully according to methical rules. (848)

In the section on appendix Tiruvalluvar discusses about the general issues whicha re to be realized by the citizens for a comfortable and peaceful living such as nobility. The high born will never deviate from these three virtues; good manners, truthfulness and modesty (952), honour, greatness, perfectness, courtesy, wealth without benediction, shamefulness, the way of maintain the family, agriculture, poevery, mendicancy, the dread of mendicancy, and baseness. The whol ambit of this work is to make people perfect int heir endeavours and free from base mentality. He contemptuously scolds the mean-minded fellows. In contrast to the perfect ones, he holds (1078). The great people willbestow their alms as soon as they are informed; but the mean, like the sugar cane, only when they are tortured to death.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Tirukkural reflects the genius of the Tamils in a remarkable way. It is at once ideal and practical, of the earthy as well as highly imaginative, simple as well as subtle, prosaic, matter of fact, earnest and forthright as well as highly poetic and emotional as is apparent in the third book dealing with love. Tiruvalluvar's moral philosophy is anthropo-centric exclusively since its focus is on life on this earth rather than aspiring for heavenly abode. Tiruvalluvar is more concerned with the problems of life and ideal solutions of for socio-political and moral issues. He was totally opposed to absolutizing and idealizing the problems and making it a other worldly affairs.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Aram:	Righteousness
Porul:	Wealth
Inbam:	Happiness
Veedu:	Release or Liberation

3.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO EPICS, PURANAS AND BHAGAVAT GITA

Contents

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit attempts to give a general outlook of the popular scriptures of Indian tradition namely the epics, *puranas* and the Gita. The popularity of them is due to their narrative style with illustrations, mythological stories and dialogical forms. They do contain high philosophical notions, but given in a popular language. Emotional attachment and devotion towards personal deities and God are the general outcome of this sort of literature.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Sanskrit tradition, scriptures are divided into two types: Revealed Texts (*Sruti* – *what is heard*) and Remembered Texts (*Smrti* – *what is remembered*). The four Vedas and 108 Upanishads come under the *Sruti* category and *Bhagavat Gita*, 18 *Puranas*, *Sastras*, *Tantras*, *Agamas* and many others, come under *Smrti* category. *Smrti* literally means recollection or memory. It is a secondary authority; it derives its authority from *sruti*. Its object is to expand and exemplify the principles of *sruti* or the Vedas. The *smrti* consist of Gita, *Brahma Sutra*, *Itihasas* (epics), *Puranas* (chronicles and legends), *Sastras* (codes of law), *Agamas* and *Tantras* (manuals of worship). The distinction between *sruti* and *smrti* is important for two following reasons; 1. In case of conflicting views, *Sruti*'s views will hold good. 2. Without requiring any change in the *sruti*, the *smrtis* preserve the authority admitting changes in it.

Agamas

Agamas are that which has been handed down as a tradition. These are the scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God. They prescribe detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. Each agama consists of four sections. They are philosophy, mental discipline, rules for the construction of temples and images, religious practices. The agamas are divided into

three according to the deity that is worshipped. The Vaisnava *agamas* (also called the *pancaratras* and *vaikhanasa agamas*) for Vishnu, the *Saiva Agamas* for *siva* and the *sakta agamas* (*tantras*) for *sakti*. Each glorifies its particular deity.

Sastras

These are codified laws regulating the society from time to time. The important law givers are: *Manu*, *Yajnavalkya* and *Parasara*. Their codes of law are known as *Sastras*. *Dharmasastra* constitutes another very important source of Indian ethics and philosophy in which detailed rules of conduct and practical moral instructions are given. *Manusmṛiti*: according to Manu by following *dharma* one attains perfection. Manu prescribes duties for all the four stages of life and four different categories of persons in the society. This book of Manu comprises the laws of Manu which has become Aryan laws. Manu is considered to be great law giver in Vedic period. The code of conduct has three divisions; rituals, discharge of social responsibility and atonement for sins. They contain 'prescription and proscription.' They are like constitution and penal code. They emphasize two aspects of life; 'dharmic' and social. The role of ritual is restricted to individual life; household work to be precise. These codes have some rigidity imposed in their interpretation and implementation. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, fourfold division of individual life is another. *Smṛiti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacharya*, *garhastya*, *vaanaprastha* and *samnyasa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *smṛiti* supported. Surely, *smṛiti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.

4.2 ITIHASAS - EPICS

Itihasa is epics. The two well-known and popular epics from Sanskrit tradition are the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, and the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa. Though the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are two epics which have influenced literature for several centuries in all parts of India. The *Ramayana* accepts the principles of *Sanatana Dharma* and duties of ruler in particular. The aim of the epics is to drive home to all the laws of the *smṛitis* and the principles of the *śruti* by means of the exploits of their great national heroes – Rama and Krishna. The *Ramayana* is the account of the deeds of a divinely great hero who set an example for the entire human race. It deals with ideal conditions of humanness a sense of brotherhood obedience to moral law firmness of character, honesty, sacrifice and unbounded goodness. *Mahabharata* has a more profound theme which involves history, mythology, ethics and metaphysics. It is the history of Bharadas, a royal family of North Indian which divided into 2 parties, *pandavas* and *Gauravas*, and so the war breaks out between them. It is an encyclopedia of Hindu dharma.

The epics are essentially different from the early Vedic literatures. They arose not among the priestly classes but among traditional bards called *sutas*. These also served as charioteers who witnessed the actual battle-scenes and described them at first-hand in their ballads. They are martial poetry, concerned not with the praise of deities but of kings and nobles, not connected with the details of sacrifices, but with events like wars, and imbued not with higher philosophical motives, but with the practical purpose of gaining some reward from the audience before whom

they were recited. We do not have them in their original and untampered form. They are added to by different hands at different periods. To the nucleus many pieces of the ancient bardic poetry containing legends connected or unconnected with the life of the epic heroes, of sacred poetry dealing with numerous myths and legends of brahmanical origin. And large sections devoted to philosophy and ethics, cosmologies and genealogies in the fashion of *puranas*, legends, fables and parables. These additions indicate the great popularity which this epic has enjoyed at all times. The zealous spirit of compilers to bring together all that could be collected in it.

The three dimensional view of Mahabharata – on mundane plane, the story deals with the realistic account of a fierce war or annihilation with its interest centred on the epic characters. The meaning on the ethical plan views the war as a conflict between the principles of *dharma* and *adharma*, between good and evil, between justice and injustice, in which the contending parties are regarded as incarnations of *devas* and *asuras* and the war ends in the victory of dharma. On the ethico-psychological plane, the epic aims at impressing upon the reader, the paramount of moral values. On the transcendental plane, which takes us beyond *dharma* and *adharma*, the war is fought not only in the *kuruksetra* but also in our own minds; this perpetual battle between the higher self and the lower self of man for establishing mastery over the body is symbolized by the fight between the cousins for sovereignty. Here we are face to face with the deep mysteries of life. The self under the guidance of the super self emerges successful in this conflict, after he has destroyed with the sword of knowledge ignorance embodied in his illegitimate desires and passions symbolized by his relatives, teachers, elders and friends ranged on the other side. Individual self, *jivatman* is Arjuna; absolute self is Krishna. Dhrtarastra is a symbol of the vacillating ego-centric self, while his sons ‘symbolize in their aggregate the brood of ego-centric desires and passions. Vidura stands for ‘*buddhi*,’ the one pointed reason, and Bhishma is tradition, the time bound element in human life and society. Though symbolism is not applied to all characters, the metaphysical interpretation leads us to the deeper meaning of the epic. The epic poets, ‘are using every means in their power to expound, illustrate, and popularize, what the philosophy of the self, a lofty philosophy of ethical autonomy, with emphasis on the application of these principles to the problems of daily life.”

It will serve our purpose if we concentrate on philosophical component of the *Mahabharata*. We can trace two philosophical issues in this work; one is expounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, rather in a very unsatisfactory manner, because it is mainly a work in theistic tradition. Second one is morality and polity expounded by two prominent characters; Vidura and Bhishma. But these philosophical issues in this work suffer from a serious drawback – draw back from philosophical point of view. Nowhere in this work do we find discussion, or criticism which is the hallmark of philosophy. More than anything else, what we find is only a sermon.

4.3 ETHICAL INSIGHTS OF EPICS

From the point of view of ethics, it is desirable to regard some characters as personification of virtue. *Vidura* and *Bhishma* belong to this category. In contrast to these characters in the *Mahabharata*, we have other characters which are regarded as personification of evil. Why should any epic portray evil characters? This is one question. Are they in a broader perspective, really evil forces? This is another question. The second question is much deeper philosophically and cannot be answered easily. First one is slightly easier to handle. An epic must be vast.

Hence it ought to include all facts of world and all aspects of life. So evil characters ought to find place in any epic worth the name.

Vidura's exposition of moral principles begins with a clear distinction between *shreyas* (desirable) and *preyas* (pleasing). He compares *shreyas* with medicine which is not palatable. It is immediately followed by a second analogy to demonstrate the status of pleasure which is invariably accompanied by evil. To make this concomitant relation explicit, *Vidura* compares pleasure with honey, pleasure seeker with one who collects honey and evil with abyss and says that the pleasure hunter is busy only in seeking honey unmindful of impending danger of falling into the abyss. In the *Mahabharata*, *Vidura* plays his role on three occasions. On second occasion, *Vidura* plays the role of a counselor. His counseling has moral base. He makes an explicit distinction between two states of mind; those of wise man and ignorant. While Plato speaks of four cardinal virtues, *Vidura* speaks of six cardinal vices. Greed is one among them. He makes out a case for wise man by listing the remaining vices - lust, anger, irrational attachment, arrogance and jealousy – which he does not possess. There is no need to describe the personality of one who is free from these vices. *Dharma* according to *Vidura* consists in everyman doing his own duty and this is the cardinal principle of welfare state. *Vidura* talks of death and the need to accept the same. Death and fear are nearly inseparable if man does not accept that death is inevitable. In this context *Vidura* accepts reality, i.e., human nature and maintains that man hardly follows wisdom.

4.4 POLITICAL THOUGHT IN EPICS

Bhisma's advice to *Dharmaraya*, specifies only the duties and responsibilities of ruler with no mention of the duties of citizen. Against this backdrop, it becomes obvious that in real sense, citizen is the king and ruler is his guardian. *Bhisma's* lecture not only explicitly mentions king's qualities and duties but also it is first ever treatise on public administration. King should be proactive, truthful and straightforward. According to *Bhisma*, these are the most important qualities of king. He should be compassionate but not too soft. The essence of '*rajadharma*' is safe-guarding the interests of citizens. In fact, *Bhisma* lists thirty-six qualities in an ideal king which are necessary to follow *rajadharma* without which the citizens do not receive protection from the king. Foreign policy is another aspect of public administration. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that king should know how to deal with enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. *Bhisma* makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one's own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemy should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.

4.5 EIGHTEEN PURANAS

Purana is a 'story of the old days' and is more than a 'myth.' It is a record of stories of antiquity. Having no parallel in western literatures, these are meant for the celebration of religion, the glorification of saints and kings, and the edification of readers, whose faith is to be strengthened. They are prolix, flowery, repetitive, derivative from earlier models, with a good deal of

borrowing, and conflation and lacking even the slender thread of history. Although we cannot date *puranas* by its character of repeating the stories of the old days, one can trace their composition from 300 CE to 1000 CE. They speak of ascendancy of this or that main god in the evolving pantheon, they tend to dedicate to that god, around whom the old stories are retold.

Puranas is devotional material from the bhakti tradition; the stories about the gods who are the objects of people's loyalty, and practices of various kinds appropriate to the worship of those gods. These consist of chronicles and legends and genealogy of kings. They are treatises of history, of cosmology, with various symbolical illustrations of philosophical principles and so forth. According to tradition there are 18 puranas. These are the scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God. They prescribe detailed courses of discipline of the worshipper. Each agama consists of four sections. They are philosophy, mental discipline, rules for the construction of temples and images, religious practices. The agamas are divided into three according to the deity that is worshipped. The Vaisnava agamas (also called the *pancaratra* and *vaikhanasa agamas*) for Vishnu, the Saiva Agamas for *siva* and the *sakta agamas* (*tantras*) for Sakti. Each glorifies its particular deity. People's response to their gods is in terms of religious practices of bhakti, prayers, ceremonial hymns, gifts given to Brahmins and gods, vows to service, *sraddhas* or ritual practices and *tirthas*.

The doctrine of avatar (divine incarnation) is fully developed in the epics and the puranas. The purpose of an *avatar* is; 1. for protection of the virtuous, 2. for destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of *dharma* (moral order). According to the puranas there 10 avatars of visnu. *Matsya* –fish, *Kurma* –tortoise, *Varaha* – boar, *Narasimha* – the man-lion, *Vamana* – dwarf, *Parasurama* –Rama with the axe, *Ramacandra* – hero of the Ramayana, *Krishna* – the god of *Bhagavad gita*, *Balarama* – Warrior Rama, *Kalki* - the hero on a white horse who is to come at the end of the *kali-yuga*.

The gods are stratified, for there appear both vedic and post vedic deities together. Of the vedic gods, *indra*, *agni*, *soma*, *vayu* and *surya* reappear in puranic lore, but they are no longer central, as they were to vedic ritual and some of their functions have changed. It is as if they have been demoted in favour of the famous Hindu 'triad' of Brahma, the creator, Visnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer, who dominate puranic literature. Each of the three has a goddess as consort; Brahma's wife is Sarasvati, patroness of music and learning; Visnu's wife is Lakshmi, goddess of fortune, sometimes beneficent and sometimes not; and Siva's wife is Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya mountain. Notable exception is found in Devimahatmya, section of the *Markandeya purana*, in which the ferocious Durga and the black Kali created spouseless out of the combined energy of the gods, become manifest to do combat with demons. Though other minor deities appear, the three major gods play an important role. The divine population includes a host of supernatural beings, like *pitrs*, dead ancestors, *gandharvas*, *apsarases*, *devas*, *asuras*, *raksasas*.

They are the instruments of popular education. Dharma or social duty reflects the same Hindu law codes basically Brahminical, and is given in illustrative stories, and in lecture form. The *puranas*, "...afford us far greater insight into all aspects of phases of Hinduism – its mythology, its idol-worship, its theism and pantheism, its love of God, its philosophy and its superstitions, its festivals and ceremonies, and its ethics, than any other works." (M. A. Mehendale, "The Purans," in *History and Culture*, vol.3. *the Classical Age*, 1954, p.296.)

‘Purana’ word has two slightly differing etymological meanings; *pura* (past), *ateetam* (Lost), *anaagatam* (about to happen) – is one meaning. *pura* (past), *bhavam* (happened) is another. In terms of structure *purana* consists of five components. They are; Description of nation or nations and their history, History of creation, History of re-creation, Description of dynasties, Story of each *Manu* (*Manvantara*) First and fourth components do incorporate elements of history. However, there is a vital difference between history and mythology. History follows a certain method and therefore, at some point to time or the other, it is possible to dispute what a historian claims, because history tries to gather as many evidences (not facts) as possible. *Puranas*, however, are altogether different. The relevance of evidences is totally alien to puranas. It is, therefore, impossible to refute what *puranas* claim. Nor can we defend the same. In addition to five components mentioned earlier, many *puranas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *puranas*. Interestingly, one *purana*, viz., *vayu-purana* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *puranas* suffer from one more defect. All *puranas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study. In defence of *puranas*, it can be said that though *puranas* are related to mainly theological issues, they include almost all activities of life and hence they ought to occupy an important position in the list of disciplines. But this all inclusiveness itself is a serious defect.

4.6 BHAGAVAT GITA

In Sanskrit tradition there are many *gita* literature. One that got popularity as it is attributed to Krishna and formed part of the famous Mahabharata, is *Bhagavat Gita*. The term ‘*bhagavad*’ means Lord, *gita* means song, and so the meaning of *Bhagavat gita* is literally, ‘Song of the Lord.’ This is the literature written in poetic form that must have been compiled around 200 BCE. In the battle of *kurusetra* Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to do his duty, good or evil without any attachment for the fruit of actions (*niskama karma*). Gita is short beautifully harmonizes the philosophy of action, devotion and knowledge. Three *gunas* *satva* (principle of light), *rajas* (source of activity), *tamas* (responsible to resist the actions) are explained well. There are two possible approaches to the *Gita*. One is regarding it as a sacred text in conformity with tradition; second, regarding it as a philosophical text. The first alternative is irrelevant to us. The second one is disappointing, because we cannot find much philosophy in it. Whatever little philosophy that can be traced in the *Gita* is of minor importance only. Generally, we expect consistency in any philosophical argument. But this is totally alien to the *Gita*. If so, what is the position of the *Gita* within the framework of philosophy and what are its virtues, if it has any?

Three features are prominent in the *Gita*; knowledge, social obligation and devotion. The confluence of these principal features constitute what is popularly known as *YOGA*. There is no need to consider its role in life which the *Gita* has explained. What is important is its position in philosophy. But there is no reference to its philosophical foundation anywhere in the *Gita*. For example, consider ‘devotion’ (*bhakti*). Devotion is sensible only when ‘*Bhakta*’ is distinct from *Paramatma*; not otherwise. In other words the refutation of the *Advaita* is a prerequisite to accept the relevance of *bhakti*. But nowhere do we find any reference to *Dvaita* or *Advaita* in the work. On the contrary, the *Gita* concludes by merging obligation or *karma* and knowledge in

Bhakti. It shows that religion receives precedence over philosophy. This becomes a stumbling block in studying the Gita from a philosophical perspective.

4.7 IDEA OF GOD IN GITA

In Gita, God is more personal. He is identified with *Krishnavatara*. He is named as *purusothama*. *Purusothama* means one who is a supreme being and intelligent with the mystical mind. He becomes a ground for mutable and immutable aspects of the universe that is he is *purusothama* in whom the whole world is grounded. Everything works by his divine intelligence and he is the creator of everything he is the ultimate cause principle of everything and has power of everything. And so, he is both transcendent and immanent. Wherever *dharma* is on decline the supreme being *purusothama* embodies himself to protect the upright and to punish the wicked and to establish *dharma*. Though he is unborn and imperishable lord of beings, yet comes into the world in his own images to maintain *dharma* in the universe. (*Gita* 4:6). Verse 14:27 says, "I am he upholder of immortal and imperishable. Brahman of absolute bliss" *Purusothama* is an embodiment of karma (actions). He is ceaselessly busy in maintaining the cosmic model. *Avidhya* should be overcome by the right knowledge. So we should unite our will and intelligence with God without expecting any fruits of our actions. Thus, he becomes the object of faith and devotion, source of mercy and love. (*Gita* 9:31).

The concept of *avatar* is prevalent even from the time of Vedas. Upanishads speak of *amsavatara* (partial manifestation of God or *avatar* is full conscious descent of god, yet into phenomenal world accepting the conditions of becoming. Wherever *dharma* is on decline the Supreme Being *Purusothama* embodies himself to protect the upright and to punish the wicked and to establish *dharma*. 7:24. Though he is unborn and imperishable lord of beings. Yet comes into the world in his own images to maintain *Dharma* in the universe 4:6. Thus, we find in Gita, God is of love and grace who evokes faith, love and devotion.

4.8 THREE MARGAS IN GITA

Karma, *jnana*, *bhakti* are three paths proposed as spiritual disciplines by Gita for the betterment of one's wealth. Karma Yoga: according to Gita every individual is expected to be *karma-yogin* ethically and intellectually virtuous. A karma yogi is the one in whom there is an absence of pride, conceit, vanity, egoism and presence of forgiveness, sincerity, purity, steadfastness, self control, renunciation, strong devotion to the Lord, reverence to the master and love for the scriptures. So if one does his duty, by his very duty, he becomes *karma-yogin* (*niskama karma*). Jnana Yoga: one should be *jnana yogi* also. *Jnana* of Brahman or *purusothama* refers to his wisdom and so for the *jnana-yogin* this *jnana* is an essential quality for his liberation. Bhakti Yoga: It insists on devotion. In this devotion a devotee should be a sincere and continuous seeker of truth. And so, he should try to get the *jnana* about the supreme being by loving the sacred scriptures. One of the means to do so is *saranagathi* which means total self-surrender of oneself to God.

One point becomes clear from the Gita; no one can attain *moksha* if he or she renounces this world. Renouncing the world is tantamount to renouncing obligations. Hence in defence of the Gita one assertion can be unhesitatingly made, that the Gita does not prioritize spirituality at the

expense of worldly life. However, neither the charge that it does so, nor the countercharge that it does not, is philosophically insignificant. But this point is mentioned because attainment of *moksha* in relation to *karma* has primary importance in the Gita.

While *Jnana* stands for realization at highest level, *Karma* assumes a very different meaning. During the *Vedic* age, *Karma* meant only performing *Yajna*. But in the Gita it has come to mean social obligation. *Yoga* came to be understood as dedication. Hence, *Karma Yoga* may be understood as discharging duty with a sense of commitment.

The most important element in the Gita is the doctrine of *nishkama karma* which consists in discharging obligations in an impersonal manner. This attitude literally debars *yagas* because one performs it with selfish motive. The Gita however, never advocated that *karma* should be renounced. What it clearly asserts is that '*Karma Phala*' should be renounced. It only sidelines personal interest and upholds societal interest. Thus individual becomes the means and society the end. An impersonal approach to duty does not affect the performer in any manner, i.e., neither success nor failure affects him or her. This attitude is '*Samatva manobhava*'—equanimity of mind.

It is necessary to clarify the relation between the meaning of *karma* and *varna*. At this stage, *chaturvarnya* (four-fold classification) becomes relevant. Translated to ordinary language, it means commitment to profession. '*chaturvarnyam mayasrishtva gunakarma vibhagshcha*'. It means *guna* (quality) and *karma* (profession) determine *Varna*. To this statement we can add another, quality determines profession. Commitment to profession is what *Dharma* is.

The Gita makes a clear distinction between commitment and interest. Commitment is impersonal, whereas interest is personal. Vested interest is well-known. But there is nothing like vested commitment. When vested interest affects an individual, he may resort to prohibited means. But impersonal commitment does not result in this sort of selection. The maxim, 'ends do not justify the means' is implicit in the Gita.

One more aspect remains to be mentioned. There is a mistaken notion that there is hierarchy in profession. It is not the case as far as the Gita is concerned. But there is a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' or 'constructive' and 'destructive'. It is good to discharge duty which is in conformity with one's own nature. Otherwise, it is bad. Clearly, there is division of labour, and it is in the interest of society that such division is made mandatory. Therefore qualitative distinction in profession is strongly disapproved.

4.9 PATH OF BHAKTI AS MEANS TO LIBERATION

The term *bhakti* is defined as "devotion," or passionate love for the Divine. *Moksha*, or liberation from rebirth was not in the following of rules, regulations or societal ordering but it was through simple devotion to the Divine. Within the movement at large, useful distinctions have been made by contemporary scholars between those poet-saints who composed verses extolling God with attributes or form, namely, "*saguna*" bhaktas, and, those extolling God without and beyond all attributes or form, "*nirguna*." While the differences between these two branches are indeed

important, their overarching similarities cannot be minimized; both focused on singular devotion, mystical love for God, and had a particular focus on a personal relationship with the Divine.

A clearer expression of Bhakti began to be formed during the Epic and the Puranic periods. Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana clearly explore Bhakti Yoga or the Path of Devotion as a means to salvation. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna preached the message of devotion to a personal God. Bhakti (love of God) not only leads the religious man to liberation, for this is a grace God is willing to bestow on all who seek to know him and love him, but is the goal itself, uniting man to God in eternal and dependent state of being. The God of Bhakti is gracious to men and has compassion for all. He is specially benevolent to those who love Him. His devotees are dear to Him. It is thus man's loving response to this divine graciousness on which he acknowledges himself utterly dependent for his salvation.

Bhakti is a very important topic found in the scriptures and with various shades of meanings in different contexts. The word bhakti is used in the scriptures in two different meanings. Bhakti means devotion towards God. Devotion is love directed towards a higher principle. Reverential love can be defined as devotion. We talk about *matr bhakti* and *pitr bhakti*. In our tradition, we look upon the parents as of worship. Similarly, we talk about *guru bhakti*, *desa bhakti* and *isvara bhakti*. Therefore, in general, bhakti is love towards a higher principle, especially love towards God. Three forms of love are 'means- love, end-love and self-love. Scriptures point out that all forms of love that a human being entertains are directed towards only three things. The first one is love of goal, wanting to achieve some end. Secondly, it is because we love them that we want to acquire them. Since the means are useful to accomplish the ends, we love the means also. The third object of love is oneself. Everyone loves himself or herself. The scriptures point out that there is a gradation in the intensity of these three forms of love. Love of the means is the least in its intensity. Love of the end is medium and love of oneself is the highest form of love, wherein the love has got the highest intensity. Most of the time love for people is purely the love for the means to accomplish the end. And often money is the end. Therefore the love for the end is superior to the love for the means. I love various ends hoping that they will give me comfort, security, happiness. It is for my benefit, my comfort, my security, my happiness, I love various ends.

Three grades of devotion

Scriptures point out that the intensity of love depends upon how you look upon God, because different people see God in different ways. The way you look upon God will determine the intensity of love. Majority of people look upon God only as the means for various worldly ends. As long as you look upon God as a means, that love is called *mandabhakti* (inferior devotion). The next set of people is still rare. They don't look upon God as means for various ends. They are mature enough. Their understanding of God is clearer. They are able to choose God as the end of life. The end of life means the goal of life. They know God represents security. God represents peace. God represents happiness. They know that everyone is seeking security, peace and happiness alone. Naturally their love of God is as the end and therefore it is more intense than the previous one. Therefore, this bhakti is *madhyama bhakti*. *Uttama bhakti* is third and rarest form of love which is the most intense form of love. It is a love in which I look upon God neither as the means nor even as the end. The lord and the self being identical, God-love is equal to self-love. Since self-love is the most intense love, that form of love is called *uttama bhakti*.

For *manda bhakti* god is dear. For *madhyama bhakti* god is dearer and for the *uttama bhakta* god is the dearest. Krisna beautifully elaborates this in the seventh and the twelfth chapters of the Gita. There are nine forms of bhakti. First three are, *manda*, *madhyama* and *uttama bhakti*, where in bhakti is the love of God. The next three are: *kara rupa*, *upasana rupa* and *jnana rupa* bhakti, wherein bhakti means spiritual discipline. The last three are *eka*, *aneka* and *arupa bhakti*, depending upon our understanding of God.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Generally, Philosophy is meant by ‘searching for’ ‘finding out,’ inquiry into’ what is truth or reality. Search for meaning has been a human activity from time immemorial, when first human beings started questioning. The possible explanations and the conclusions of their quest for truth, become philosophical thoughts. From the primitive to contemporary human being, this quest for truth is continuous. Time and again, Human society checks with its conclusions and definitions of reality, in the time of contemporary issues and questions. When encountered with irrelevant answers from the previous conceptions, they try for new answers for the new questions or even for the same old questions. In our present endeavour, we understand that the thoughts of the people of that time are ancient. As the quest for truth is an on going process, we consider the thoughts of people at the ancient times are not totally ‘antiquated.’ If they deserve only to be beautiful antiques, they would lose the significance and relevance to us today. The philosophical quest and the conclusions of the ancient times are ever fresh in our contemporary period too. They are ancient but never antiquated, out dated. ‘Ancient’ also brings to our mind, the concept of history. We fix the period in the past and look into what went on in that period in the minds of our ancestors. In India, we do not have strict linear understanding of history. Indian history is most shaped by circular notion of history. It is more of *kairological* than chronological. Therefore, we take care of thoughts being recorded in oral or written form. Often, something is considered to be philosophical, only when they are presented in a written form. In India, more than the written forms, ideologies are recorded in various other means of communication, such as oral transmission, art, architectures, dance, songs cultural customs and traditions.

The *puranas*, *itihasas* and *gita* emphasize on the necessity of ethics and advocates deep contemplation on moral virtues and self-control. It deals with cosmic & moral order maintaining peace, harmony and order in society and cosmos. In them, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics are intricately interrelated that it is very difficult to understand any of them in isolation. It is cosmic and spiritualistic, synthetic and integral. A clearer expression of Bhakti began to be formed during the Epic and the Puranic periods. Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana clearly explore Bhakti Yoga or the Path of Devotion as a means to salvation.

4.11 KEY WORDS

Puranas : Ancient legends or histories of heroes and gods.

Bhakti : Devotion or love towards Personal God.

Nishkama karma : Doing action without any attachment to the fruits of them.

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