

Chapter – 1

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Indian Philosophy : Different Types and General Attitude

Before going into a detailed discussion some explanation of the use of words like 'spiritual', 'vidyā' and 'mukti' is necessary in this context. The word 'spiritual' does not stand here for some weird or mysterious ghost like reality. We use the word here because in the English language there is no better alternative to translating the word – 'ātman' in any other way than 'spiritual soul'. At the most it may be said that this word is metaphysical. Now to discuss in brief the *upaniṣadic* use of the word 'vidyā'. Generally 'vidyā' stands for philosophic knowledge. The *Muṇḍakāpaniṣad* has called it 'parāvidyā'. *Tattvajñāna* is knowledge of the reality, which is characterised by the *Upaniṣads* as the imperishable or immortal (*akṣara*). This reality is *ātman* or *Brahman* and, according to the *Upaniṣads*, philosophy is nothing but 'ātma vidyā' or 'Brahma vidyā'. 'Ātma-jñāna' (knowledge of *ātman*), however, is not knowledge in the epistemological sense of the term. It rather conveys something more when we discuss the nature of 'ātma-jñāna' or (*Brahman-jñāna*). For reality and summum bonum merge in the single ideal of immortality the attainment of which is considered as highest important. For example –

Brahmavidyā is described as the foundation of all knowledge, and we are advised to get this knowledge from worthy teachers. We are warned further that it would be possible for us to attain our goal (or good) only if we can have this knowledge in this life, otherwise, great is the destruction. It would be useful in this connection to note the distinction made by the *kāthopaniṣad* between the good and the pleasant (*śreyas* and *preyas*). It says that the wise man chooses the 'good', indeed, rather than the 'pleasant'. The (*śreyas*) good is of course the attainment of *Brahman* or 'ātman'.

1. i. The notion of 'tattvajñāna'

All the systems of Indian thought agreed that the ignorance can be removed by right knowledge (*tattvajñāna*), and that liberation can be attained by it. But the systems also make it clear that mere theoretical acquaintance with truth is not sufficient for the dissolution of ignorance. By 'right knowledge' the Indian thinkers mean continued meditation on the truths and a direct realisation of those truths in life. Ignorance is deep-rooted in human minds, and a mere theoretical knowledge cannot uproot it.

Indian thinkers have felt the necessity of continued meditation and self-control as the pre-requisites to right knowledge. The philosophic truths

that are momentarily established and understood through arguments are not enough to dispel ignorance. Prolonged meditation on these truths is necessary to instil them into our life. Self-control is necessary for concentration of mind on these truths and for making them effective in life. With unbridled mind it is not possible to concentrate on truth. Thus the first condition of concentration would be impossible if mind runs after sensuous objects of its own choice. Our senses must be weaned from past habits and brought under the reign of reason. Self-control therefore means the control of the lower self by the higher self or rational self.

Self control (*saṁyama*) also is necessary for such concentration on these truths and for making them effective in life. According to Socrates, 'Virtue is knowledge'. His followers pointed out that mere knowledge of what is right does not always lead to right actions. because our actions are guided as much by reason as by blind animal impulses. Unless these impulses are controlled, action cannot fully follow the dictates of reason. This truth is recognised by all the Indian systems. except perhaps the *Cārvāka*. It is neatly expressed by an oft-quoted Sanskrit saying, which means : 'I know what is right, but no inclination to follow it; I know what is wrong but cannot desist from it ? (*'Jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛtīh/Janamyadharmam na ca me nivṛtīh'*).

Self-control, then means the control of the lower self, the blind, animal tendencies – love and hate – as well as the instruments of knowledge and action (the *indriyas*). From what has been said above it will be clear that self - control was not a mere negative practice, it was not simply checking the ‘*indriyas*’, but checking their bad tendencies and habits in order to employ them for a better purpose, and make them obey the dictates of reason.

We have seen that the same reality is called from the subjective side as ‘*ātman*’ and from the objective side as ‘*Brahman*’. The two terms are used as synonyms. The absolute of the *Upaniṣads* manifests itself as the subject as well as the object and transcends them both. The absolute is as certain as the *ātman* and also as infinite as the *Brahman*. This blending of the subject and the object in a transcendental principle, this synthesis of the soul and the non-soul in the absolute, this dialectical march of pure self-consciousness from the subject through the object to its own synthetic nature was arrived at by the *Upaniṣadic* sages centuries before Hegel, and many many years before Plato was born. It was here for the first time the original thinkers of the *Upaniṣads*. found it when they recognised our *ātman*, our inmost individual being as the *Brahman*, the inmost being of universal nature and of all her phenomena. ‘That thou art’ (*tat tvam asi*) is the great saying (*mahāvākya*) of the *Upaniṣads*. ‘I am

Brahman’, ‘*ātman is Brahman*’, ‘I am that’, ‘I am the non dual Bliss’. The subject lacked certitude. The absolute has both infinitude and certitude. The soul and the not soul are equal manifestations of the absolute and are at bottom one. The individual soul is, in fact, no longer individual, but universal. The microcosm and the macrocosm are blended together. In microcosm we find the three states, viz., waking, dreaming and sound sleep and we find the soul as the Fourth, the immanent yet transcendent reality. In macrocosm waking (*jāgrat*) corresponds to *virāt*, dreaming (*svapna*) to *hiranyagarbha*, deep sleep (*susupti*) to *Īśvara*, and the fourth (*turīya*) to *Brahman*. In macrocosm, body corresponds to *virāt*, life and mind correspond to *hiranyagarbha*; self-consciousness corresponds to *Brahman*. The absolute is pure existence, pure knowledge, and pure bliss – all in one. It has been called *sachhidānanda*. It is *satyam* (truth), *jñānam* (knowledge) and *anantam* (infinite). It is truth, goodness and beauty – *satyam-śivam-sundaram*. By knowing it the unseen becomes the seen, the unknown becomes the known, the unthought becomes the thought of.

True philosophic knowledge (*tattvajñāna*) is the secondary effect of *bhakti*. True *tattvajñāna* consists in the realisation of God in His three-fold form, as *Brahman*, *Paramātman* and *Bhagavān* in relation to His

three-fold powers, with which He is both identical and different. This reality of God can only be properly realised.

One, who acquires *tattvajñāna*, attains full freedom from the shattering influences of the various impurities of the world. Philosophy was recommended in India not for the sake of knowledge, but for the highest purpose that man can strive after in this world.

All Indian religions and philosophical systems except that of materialism (*Cārvāka*) take *mukti* or freedom from suffering and worldly life (*saṃsāra*) as the goal of spiritual endeavour. The present state of man is one of pain and suffering (*duḥkha*), a state of bondage conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā, ajñāna*) from which release is sought. The means for achieving freedom is the cancellation of ignorance by knowledge of reality (*tattvajñāna*).

1.ii. The notion of ‘*Mukti*’ and ‘*Nirvāṇa*’

Although in itself the state of *mukti* is positive, it is gained by the divestification and discarding of delusions and wrong identifications of the soul with the non-soul (body, possessions). It is therefore expressed in negative terms and is said to be inexpressible as in the case of *nirvāṇa*. The state of redemption is eternal, everlasting and absolute. This is to be sharply distinguished from paradise or heavenly joy (*svarga*) or

enjoyment of pleasures. Neither it is a state of acquisition, nor is a conferment or bestowal of some status by God on man.

The idea of redemption or freedom from suffering may be practical or religious, but the means or the way leading to such redemption is philosophical. It is by the gaining of knowledge or insight into the nature of the real, which dispels illusion and ignorance.

Suffering, unlike enjoyment, which lulls us into a sense of security, engenders reflection. Man becomes aware of himself when he becomes aware of his deep involvement. To be conscious of suffering is to be conscious of an alternative to the present state in which we happen to find ourselves. Without the contrast between what is and what might have been, between the actual state and the possible, there could be no sense of grievance; hence no suffering. If everything that happens to us were thought to be completely inevitable and inexorable, there could be no grievance. We feel that things can be helped; they could have been otherwise; we could have done better. Thus, in all suffering, man is conscious, however implicitly, of freedom, of the non-inevitability of the present situation and of his ability to help it.

If, on the other hand, we enjoyed freedom so completely as to dominate all situations and if our will could prevail absolutely over all and always,

there would be no suffering. This, then, is the inherent dialectic of suffering. Man is free, but not completely free. Suffering discloses the inherent freedom of man. And although it is freedom in involvement, it is pregnant with possibilities. There is a demand to realise freedom fully and in final form, as *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*.

The germ of spirituality is implicit in suffering (*duḥkha*). *Buddhism* and all the systems of Indian philosophy (excluding the *Cārvāka*) show their keen spiritual insight in beginning with the truth of suffering (*duḥkha-satya*). To all of them, not only the actual state of painful feeling, but phenomenal existence in its entirety (*saṃsāra*) is suffering. A state of unpleasant feeling is but sample of what could befall us at all times. The awareness is not complete unless it is extended before and after this life. Its inexorability, given the causes and conditions, which engender it, must be realised. Much of our pleasure is pain in the making; pleasures make us hanker after them and thus create anxiety. Frustration in this pursuit begets anger, bitterness and conflict. Moreover, one's pleasures are by way of encroaching upon others. We seem to take for granted our right to happiness, even though it may be at the expense of others. Again, our short-sightedness and distraction in the immediate present prevent us from approaching our existence in all its comprehension and depth.

There are two fundamental pre-suppositions underlying this position. The first is that all our troubles are due to ignorance (*avidyā*, *ajñāna*) is the cause of suffering. The nature of ignorance or wrong knowledge differs somewhat from system to system depending upon their different metaphysical standpoints. In the *sāṃkhya*, it is nothing but wrong identification of the soul (*puruṣa*) with the object (*prakṛti*) in its various modification beginning with the intellect; in the *Advaita Vedānta*, it is considering the soul which is really the infinite *Brahman* as finite and limited. In *Jainism*, it is the intrusion of *kārmic* matter into the soul (*jīva*). In earlier *Buddhism*, it is the substance-idea itself, wrongly taking things (which are really changing and perishing) as permanent and identical and clinging to them; in the *mādhyamika*, it is indulging in philosophical speculation, in the setting forth of views of the real.

The second presupposition, which is almost a consequence of the first, is that in the make-up of the soul there are several layers or aspects. To a superficial view, the individual is the 'body-mind-I' complex, and in the ordinary course of life the distinction among these elements is seldom made. It is only when we become reflective and begin to raise questions about our true nature that the distinction can be made. Spiritual discipline has for its objective the progressive realisation of the pure soul as distinct from the body. The body itself is understood in a much wider sense, to

include not only the psychical but also the sense-organs, the mental states, the intellect, the psychical dispositions etc., which constitute the inner body, as it were. It is stripping the 'I' of all its external trappings and accidental accretions. The point to be reached is a foundational consciousness that is unconditional, self-evident and immediate (*svayam-prakāśa*). It is that to which every thing is presented, but is itself no presentation, that which knows all, but is itself no object. The soul should not be confused with the contents and states. which it enjoys and manipulates. If we have to give an account of it. we can describe it only as what it is not; for any positive description of it would be possible only if it could be made an object of observation, which from the nature of the case it is not. We "know" it only as we withdraw ourselves from the body with which we happen to be identified in this transition.

The *vedānta* teaches that such a foundational soul is there and can be reached by the right kind of discipline. The *sāṃkhya* view is not very different. *Mahāyāna Buddhism* implicitly affirms the existence of a deep underlying reality behind all empirical manifestations in the conception of *śūnyatā* (the indeterminate, the void), or *vijñaptimātratā* (consciousness only), or the *tathatā* (that-ness) or *dharmatā* (noumenal reality). Its spiritual discipline differs considerably from that of the *vedānta* or the *sāṃkhya*, but the ultimate goal is remarkably similar.

As it has been mentioned before freedom is not a conferment of something, which one did not possess; it is release from delusion and suffering. God does not confer freedom; he may and does show us the way to achieve freedom. That is his grace. In the forthcoming discussion we shall see that freedom is not exactly the same as the salvation of the Semitic religions.

The solution of suffering offered by the *vedānta* and the *mahāyāna Buddhism*, which understand freedom as the attainment of a positive state of fullness and complete identification with all beings is both a negative process and a positive attainment. It is negative in so far as the 'I' is dissociated from its accidental limitations by the removal of ignorance; but this results in a positive and transcendent realisation of one's true nature as the absolute.

The theistic schools of *śaivism* and *vaiṣṇavism* conceive the highest goal of human attainment as an intimate and inalienable relationship with God and not as complete identity.

What is the state of final redemption ? It is a kind of ineffable absorption into the abyss of the Absolute (*Brahman* or *nirvāṇa*), or is it a form of God realisation ? This is bound up with the question whether there is separate and individual salvation from time to time or universal salvation.

The question is discussed in all seriousness and implication both in *mahāyāna Buddhism* and the *advaita vedānta*, where it takes the pointed form of “freedom of one or of all” (*eka-mukti* or *sarva-mukti*).

Mahāyāna Buddhism has clearly given the answer in its doctrine of the *Buddha* and *bodhisattva* (one whose essence is perfect wisdom). Even while entering the path of spiritual discipline for enlightenment, the *bodhisattva* makes the great vows. The chief one of these is that the merit and the knowledge that he should acquire would be for all beings, high and low, and not for himself. He shuns retiring into the final state of *nirvāṇa*, though fully entitled to it, preferring, by his own free choice, to toil for even the lowest of beings for ages. He is actuated by this motiveless altruism from the very start of his career. It is not that the *bodhisattva* cannot achieve his own freedom without achieving the freedom of all. For this would involve a vicious circle; he cannot free others without first making himself free and he cannot free himself without making free others. No, his freedom is full and complete by itself; but he condescends to raise others to his level. This is a free phenomenalising act of grace and compassion. A deeply religious element is introduced into *Buddhism*, which would have otherwise remained an exalted moral naturalism. In Lord *Buddha*, we have the conception of a person without any trace of ego. There is activity without

attachment. In the *mahāvagga* of the *vinaya-pīṭaka* we have a very moving account of how *Gautama* the *Buddha* was sorely tempted, after his enlightenment, to pass away into the final release, but was persuaded by *Brahma*, the Great God (actually, his inmate religious consciousness), to accept the ministry. It is not that as one achieves freedom one is absorbed into the Absolute wholly and at once. Though free, one has still enough of the phenomenal in oneself to feel kinship with fellow beings and to help them out of worldly life. Freedom does not repel personality; nor does all personality mean bondage. There can be a free person, and the *Buddha* is such a person.

In *advaita vedānta*, too, the position is not different. It is definitely accepted that, as long as other individuals remain to be liberated, the free self-realises his union, perhaps even his oneness, with God (*Īśvara*), rather than become merged in the Absolute (*Brahman*). For, as long as other individual souls are struggling in this world, the distinction between God (*Īśvara*) and the finite selfness (*jīvas*) will remain; there is no Pure Being (*Brahman*) as such apart from its varied manifestations. God will continue to perform his function as long as there are any souls needing to realise their identity with *Brahman*. How and when will there be the state in which all the souls shall have been freed is an apocalyptic question that cannot be easily answered. The possibility of such a happy event as the

total release of all souls is not ruled out. It is stated with cogent argument that identity with the Lord (*Īśvara-bhāva-patti*) is the nature of liberation of individual souls.

According to *Buddhism*, the soul is not the individual or limited soul; it is *nirvāṇa* itself, which is of the nature of bliss and consciousness, and is eternal, immutable, inexpressible and unfathomable. From the description of *nirvāṇa* as found in the canonical literature, it can be concluded that *nirvāṇa* is the universal soul which at the same time is the real soul of individual, just as *Brahman*, the Absolute, is according to the *advaita vedāntins*, the real soul of the *jīva*.

The term *mokṣa* or *mukti* has been derived from the root *mokṣ* or *muç* respectively, which means 'to be free from'. The *mokṣa* means to be free from the circuit of birth and death, and consequently from all kinds of worldly pains. In other words, the word 'mokṣa' is derived from the root 'muç' which means to loose, to set free, to release, to let go. The word 'mokṣa' always presupposes (*bandhana*) bondage. There can be no 'mokṣa' unless there is bondage. In other words, release from bondage is 'mokṣa' or liberation. *Bandhana* is said to be caused by the ignorance on the part of the individual about the real nature of his being.

Philosophical system in India is called *mokṣa-śāstra* or ‘the science of liberation’ for the aim of all the systems of Indian philosophy is to show us the means for the attainment of liberation. Dr. S.N. Dasgupta in his ‘*Yoga philosophy*’ in relation to other systems of Indian thought, told *mokṣa* has been rightly called the pivot on which all the systems of Indian philosophy revolve.¹

According to *hindu* ethical thought, the ends of human action are four : *dharma* (duty or virtue), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasure or happiness) and *mokṣa* (liberation or emancipation). Of these four objects of human endeavour *dharma* and *artha* are not primary ends, or ends in themselves, but are means to the other two ends viz., ‘*kāma*’ and *mokṣa*. ‘*Kāma*’ and ‘*mokṣa*’ are not means to other ends, but are regarded as ultimate ends. It has been held by all the Indian thinkers excepting *Cārvākas* that *mokṣa* is the summum bonum or the highest ends between the two. The *Cārvākas*, however, do not share this view. According to them, there is nothing as after world and soul is nothing but this body. So the ultimate goal or summum bonum of life should be ‘*kāma*’, or sensuous pleasure. The notion of liberation is nothing but absurdity.

‘*Kāma*’ and ‘*mokṣa*’ are values per se whereas ‘*artha*’ and ‘*dharma*’ are valuable only as a means to ‘*kāma*’ and ‘*mokṣa*’ respectively. This becomes clear from the *śruti* also. We find in the *katho-Upaniṣad* only

two paths, viz., *preyas* and *śreyas*, the path of worldly enjoyments and the path of the good. There 'mokṣa' has been regarded as *śreyas*. The highest value is bestowed on 'mokṣa' after realising, which nothing else remains to be realised.

REFERENCE

1. "*History of Indian Philosophy*," 1932, 245-254 p., Surēndranath Dasgupta, Cambridge University Press, Vol. II, London, 1932.



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