

# **Chapter - VI**

## SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN MILINDA PRASNA

### LAW OF KARMA

The Vision of law and order in creation is revealed in the *Rta* of the R̥g-Veda. The Law of *Karma* is the law of conservation of moral energy. It is the counterpart in the moral world of the physical law of Uniformity. According to the principle of *Karma*, there is nothing uncertain or capricious in the moral world. We reap what we sow. The good seed brings a harvest of good, the evil of evil. Every little action has its effect on character. The attempt to overleap the *law of Karma* is as futile as the attempt to leap off one's shadow. It is the psychological principle that our life carries within it a record that time cannot blur or death erase out. A man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds. Suffering is the wages of sin. Some men are happy and some miserable, some men wise and some ignorant. Moreover, it is found that some virtuous men suffer and wicked people prosper in this world.

The *law of Karma* is this general moral law which governs not only the life and destiny of all individual beings, but even the order and harmony of the physical world.

The doctrine of *Karma* has a number of philosophical and

social implications. Almost in every Indian system we find it clearly recognised that *Karma* as understood by the Indian from the remotest past implies in same form or the other the action of *Avidyā* or non-dualistic, *Ātmā* in its essence is held to be purely divine. It is only through the influence of *Karma* that it is compelled to take a body and pass through the life of joy and suffering. An intellect which is clouded by ignorance is never expected to be able to have a glimpse into the origin of things. The other systems of Indian philosophy say each from its own point of view almost the same thing.

All schools of Indian philosophy except the Cārvāka believe in the *Law of Karma*. A right action inevitably produces a good consequence. There is no escape from the consequences of actions. Their fruits must be reaped in this life or in a future life. The *Law of Karma* is the inexorable law of moral causation.

The Buddhist, the Jaina, the Saṁkhya and the Mīmāṃsā believe in impersonal *Law of Karma* which adjusts the realm of nature to the realm of spirits. But the other systems believe in God who is the dispenser of the *Law of Karma*.

How beautiful diagnosis of Hindu philosophy of *Karma* is. *Karma* is dominant and not birth. We rise and fall by our deeds. In the words of Lord Krishna, "*Karmanyeva adhikāraṣṭe mā phalesu*

*Kadācana.*" O man, do your duty without idea of its fruit. *Niṣkāma-Karma* is enjoyed. Duties should be performed without desire for fruits. Prescribed duties should be done for the sake of duty without attachment for their fruits. Manu, the great Hindu law-giver says that all are born in low-caste. By deeds we become high-caste. The *Bhagavadgītā*, too, emphasises the supremacy of Brāhmans on the basis of temperance, austerity and restraint and not on birth.

*Karma Yoga* is not opposed to *Jñāna yoga*. The former is possible when the latter is attained. The constituents of *Prakṛti*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* necessarily give rise to actions. As Wordsworth says :

*"The eye cannot choose but see,  
We cannot bid the ear be still,  
Our bodies feel where'er they be  
Against or with our will."*<sup>1</sup>

The Universe itself depends on actions. Inertia is not liberty, but death. Work keeps up the cycle of the universe and it is the duty of every individual to help it. He who does not do so and finds pleasure in the senses is sinful and lives in vain. The ideal of the *Gītā* is not negation of actions, but performance of actions in a detached spirit. It is not *Naiṣkarmya*, but *Niṣkāmya Karma*. The giving up is not of

action itself, but of interest, desire, fruit attachment regarding actions. Desire binds a man; he should therefore act in such a way when action does not bind. The *Gītā* synthesises both *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*. The *Gītā* teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action. Actions are our sphere; fruits are not our concern. We should never be attached to the fruits of actions and at the same time we should never be inactive. But without knowledge, renunciation of desire and attachment is not possible. So only a true *Jñānī* can perform *niṣkāma karma*. Hence only fools and not wise people speak of *jñāna* and *karma* as different and opposed; really they are one.<sup>2</sup>

Every individual is born with certain aptitudes and predispositions which constitute his innate nature (*svabhāva*) and determine his station in the society. "All work is worship". Each class of persons ought to do its own duties, and refrain from meddling with others' duties. The Hindu concept of four classes anticipates Plato's concept of different classes of men in the society with different duties for the highest social good. This ethical teaching of the *Bhagavat Gītā*, Plato and Bradley's conception of "my station and its duties" is in keeping with teaching of modern psychology.

The perfect man has no axe of his own to grind. He simply acts for the good of the people. The Lord Himself, though He has

nothing to accomplish for Himself, acts for the benefit of humanity. The perfect man also has to work for the benefit of humanity in the spirit of perfect detachment, disinterest, selflessness, with no desire to reap the fruit. He alone is capable of doing so. The liberated 'cave-dweller' in Plato goes again into the cave to free others. He who performs actions in a detached manner, thinking himself to be a mere instrument of God, is not contaminated by sin.

Hīnayānism admits action without an agent. *Karma* is an impersonal law which works by itself. Unlike the orthodox Hindu "*karma*", in Buddhism does not depend on any divine power. The doctrine of action plays a very important role in Buddhism. The law of action is not imposed from nothing. We cannot escape from the effect of our deeds. When a man dies, his physical organism which is the basis of physical existence ends psychical organism. The continuity of action is maintained between two lives separated by the phenomenon of death. So the practice of good deeds has to be repeated. In the words of Buddha, "we are heir to our deeds." A man, with good deeds, at his back, is a man of light, a man, with bad deeds, at his back, is a man with darkness, a man, with bad and good deeds, is a man with light and darkness.

In Buddhist system of thought *Avidyā* or ignorance lies in the background of *Karma*. It is said that in the world of desire a man

through his virtuous actions can rise upto the top of this world and attain to the status of a *Deva*. The true aim of human life is peace and freedom from sorrow. This cannot be attained except through Karma and meditation.

Let us now take up the doctrine of action as depicted in non-canonical texts. In the conversation between the king Milinda and Nāgasena as found in the famous *Milindapañha*, the effect of action is discussed in detail. The king wants to know what causes difference between man and man, and the answer received is action (*Karma*) which is the main criterion for a man. King Milinda further told Nāgasena, "those who die of *Karma*, or of journeying or of activity, or of old age, all die in fullness of time, even he who dies in the womb, is his appointed time, so that he too dies in fullness of time, and so of him who dies in the birth chamber or when he is a month old or at any age upto a hundred years. It is always his appointed time, and it is in the fullness of time that he dies. So, Nāgasena, there is no such thing as death out of due season. For all who die, die at the appointed time.<sup>3</sup> The conversation between king Milinda and Nāgasena makes it evident that virtue takes a long time to die but guilt becomes evident at once even in this present life. The effect of *Karma* becomes manifest in future birth. Nāgasena was asked about what are to be "*Karma-born*". Nāgasena answered that "All

beings, O King, who are conscious, are *Karma-born*." Nāgasena says that it is because of difference in their *Karma* that men are not all alike. Some are long-lived, some short-lived, some are healthy and some sickly, some are handsome and some ugly, some are powerful and some weak, some rich and some poor, some of high degrees and some of low degrees, some wise and some foolish. All these differences are caused by the difference in the *Karma* performed by the individuals.<sup>4</sup>

According to all Indian tradition maintained by the Buddhists, the Jainas and Brahmanical Hindus man is the ultimate arbiter of his own fate and destiny. Action is the connecting link between one life with another. Buddhism, of course, denies the existence of soul but it admits the unbroken continuity of Action.

Most of the modern personalities have given an impressive conception regarding the doctrine of *Karma*. Hindu thought has given tremendous importance to the doctrine of *Karma*. Our present life and body are on account of our past *Karmas*.

According to Gandhi, every individual is unique because of his peculiar physical and mental inheritance and equipment. For Gandhi, the *Law of Karma* appears to be more important because it is consistent with his moral convictions and also with his kind of faith in rebirth. The realisation that one's own *Karmas* determine the

future nature and status of an individual. Such a realisation will create a sense of responsibility in man, to raise himself by himself so that he can fully express him.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, also in a general way accepts the importance of *Karma*. But the originality of Sri Aurobindo's view lies in recognising the limitation of this law. The *Law of Karma* can only be one of the processes, that it uses for the purpose. He says that our spirit or the self must be greater than its *Karma*. *Karma* is only an instrument.<sup>6</sup>

Vivekananda says, "*Karma-yoga*..... is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. The *Karma-yogī* need not believe in any doctrine whatsoever. He may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selflessness, and he has to work it out himself."<sup>7</sup>

To Swami Vivekananda, the action is justified which gives universal welfare, peace and happiness. Hence, action is essential for the harmonisation and equality among all men. In connection with his philosophy of action he has brought harmony between physical strength and spiritual strength. One is complementary to other. Hence we find a harmony between physical strength and spiritual strength.

Vivekananda's Vedānta encourages us in the philosophy of

action. His vedānta does not make us away from the world of activity but induces us in action. One who is 'strong' in the above-mentioned sense can do action for the welfare and happiness of all (*Bahujanahitāya Bahujanasukhāya*). For this the physical weakness which is the cause of our miseries is to be removed. The physical weakness which we possess is the cause of our laziness due to which we cannot work, we do not love each other. The said laziness is the prime cause of selfishness. The physical strength which gives rise to strong brain is to be augmented. Without this we will have idle and weak brain which cannot do social welfare or any positive selfless work. That is why Vivekananda has emphasised that all young men should be strong at first and then adopt religion. According to him "you will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Gītā". The only way to think oneself strong is to believe - "I am the soul", but we should never say that we are weak. This conviction leads us to the path of *Karma*. An individual can prove his existence through *Karma* for others. Vivekananda says - "But I will tell you in plain language that you work best when you work for others."

Vivekananda very reverently takes the example of the life of Lord Buddha, who after attaining *Nirvāṇa*, kept on working throughout his life for the good of men and expected no return. Vivekananda says, "He works best who works without any motive, neither for

money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of *Karma-yoga*.<sup>8</sup>

In this brief analysis we find that the doctrine of *Karma* occupies an important position in spiritual path of a human being. It is a moral force recognised by all the Indian systems. It was the foundation stone of the cultural thinking.

The point discussed by Nāgasena to the king Milinda is a very interesting one. It has to be taken carefully in a systematic study of the philosophical standpoint until free moral atmosphere is changed to social stability and moral life and ultimately it is given up for ever when moral life is replaced by spiritual life and with the surrender of a man to the Divine will begin the period of self transformation. "The history of an individual" - write Radhakrishnan, "does not begin at his birth, but has been for ages in the making!"

## REBIRTH

The theory of rebirth was enunciated in the *Upaniṣads*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* says that just as an insect going to the end of a leaf of grass by a new effort collects itself in another. This life thus presupposed another existence. Birth is followed by death. Death is followed by rebirth. The cycle goes on until liberation is attained by an individual self. Buddha, was the first man, who had made a serious attempt to deal with the doctrine of Rebirth.

All schools of philosophy except the Cārvākas believed in it and so little is known to us of the *Cārvāka sūtras* that it is difficult to say what they did to refute this doctrine. The Buddha also accepts it as a fact and does not criticize it. This life therefore comes only as one which had an infinite number of lives before and which except in the case of a few emancipated ones would have an infinite number of them in the future. It was strongly believed by all people, and the Buddha also, when he came to think to what our present birth might be due, he had to fall back upon another existence (*Bhava*). If *Bhava* means *Karma* which brings rebirth then it would mean that the present birth could only take place on account of the works of a previous existence which determined it. Here also we are reminded of the Upanisadic notes "as a man does so will he be born". (*Yat Karma Kurute Tadabhisampadyate*, Brh. IV, iv, 5).

Buddha denied soul and hence he has denied also the theory

of transmigration of souls. But does life end after death ? What about the good and bad deeds committed by man in this life ? Life is an endless process. How can it end at a point ?

This apparent contradiction is solved by modern dialectics by realising that life in general is endless, humanity and progress are endless and the good and evil deeds of man are remembered by his successors. The individual body and mind vanish but his contribution to society lives and becomes part of the eternal human process. There is a continuity of human consciousness. A lamp fades out and kindles another lamp. A man dies. His consciousness enters another body. The theory of rebirth is introduced into Buddhism by the backdoor.

The King Milinda, raises an interesting point about the oneness of transmigration and Rebirth. The king asked Nāgasena whether the same person is born or another. Nāgasena replied that neither the same nor the another is born. Just as it would not be right to say that the ghee, butter, and curds are the same as the milk. Neither it would be right to say that they are something else. The king also asked whether the man who will not be born is aware of the fact or not. Nāgasena's utterance was that it can be possible only through the cessation of all, that is, cause or condition of rebirth. Again if a man knows, he would not be born, he would be free from any painful

feeling. Nāgasena again continues his discussion by saying that it is the name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) that are reborn and in that name and form good and evil actions done another is reborn so the other is not free from the former.

Then the king again asked Nāgasena that whether he will be born again or not. Nāgasena replied very easily that if he dies with clinging in his mind, he will be born again, and if not any mental clinging he will not be born. Again he explains the meaning of name and form. Whatever is gross therein that is "form". Whatever is subtle, mental, that is "name".<sup>9</sup>

These conditions are related like the yoke or an egg and its shell. They have been related from time immemorial.

So, if there were no name there would be no form. What is meant by name in that expression being intimately dependent on what is meant by form, they spring up together. And this is, true from time immemorial.

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Hardy speaks of the theory of Rebirth by making a comparison.

This as follows : Just as the light comes from the same lamp all the night through, in the same way, great king, one being is conceived, another is born, another dies, when comprehended by the mind, it is like a thing that has no before, and no after; no preceding, no succeeding existence. Thus the being who is born does not continue the same, nor does he become another; the consciousness, is thus united with the rest.

A man at any one moment, is precisely all that he is the conscious of. *The phrase of his self-consciousness the totality of that of which he is conscious*, is always changing; and is so different at death from what it was at birth that, in a certain sense, he is not the same at the one time as he was at the other. But there is a continuity in the whole series - a continuity dependent on the whole body. And this is appropriate to the simile, in which the lamp is the body, and the flame the changing self-consciousness.

In modern time, so many great personalities of India also believe in Rebirth and the Law of *Karma*. Gandhi gives a moral interpretation to this doctrine. By believing in the possibility of rebirth one is able to make adjustments with life. This belief enables men to be loving, kind, moral and benevolent even in the midst of his bitter experiences of jealousy, hatred and strife. This world is not the end of everything. Belief in rebirth becomes a condition for a pious, moral and noble living.

Again Sri Aurobindo's account of Rebirth and *Karma* is not merely an old wine in a new bottle, it contains strikingly original ideas, which, in certain respects similar to the traditional Indian notions about *Karma* and Rebirth. But his idea emphasises on certain elements which carry the mark of Sri Aurobindo's original insight and freshness. Sri Aurobindo tries to assign to the notion of Rebirth a place in his general scheme of evolution. He asserts that Rebirth is an aspect of the general process of evolution and ascent.<sup>10</sup>

The doctrine of the plurality of selves along with the consciousness of the fact of death leads Radhakrishnan to develop a doctrine of Rebirth also. If souls have to retain their individuality till the end of the cosmic process, they must continue to exist in some form or the other even after death. Rebirth therefore means survival, it is continuing to exist by assuming different bodies after death. Radhakrishnan is aware that it is difficult to understand the mechanism of rebirth fully, but an awareness of the unfulfilled urges and tendencies in the purposive set-up of the universe compels us to think about some possible forms of life after death. We cannot, in one life, exhaust all the potentialities of life. The most general ground for the rejection of a belief in rebirth is the fact that there is no evidence of anybody having any memory of the past life. But Radhakrishnan says that lack of memory about the past life is not an adequate ground

for rejecting the belief in rebirth. Nobody has any memory of his existence in his mother's womb, but that does not mean that, that is not a state of existence. Death puts an end to the memory-capacity, but sufficient evidences of the tendencies of the past are available in life. The inborn patterns of behaviour and some of the peculiarities of the individual can be explained only by presupposing a prior birth.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of this philosophical question of rebirth is nothing but the philosophy of eternal change. It raises the revolt against the metaphysical thinking of *Upaniṣads*. The mentality of "change according to times" which is however a part of Indian culture is the contribution of *Hīnayāna* Buddhist to India. In the words of Oldenberg "*Upaniṣads* saw being in all becoming, Buddha saw becoming in all being."

## LOVE

In the ancient time, the idea of *Love* and *Bhakti* was announced by Lord Kṛṣṇa and He taught his dear disciple Uddhava, who was very proud of his sound knowledge, how a wise man by acquiring vast knowledge can argue only, the real idea of *Love* regarding the Infinite can be able to free oneself from the bondage of sufferings and can attain eternal peace which is the destiny of every human being. With the help of this weapon we can be able to win the heart of others. When the hatred is totally abolished from our heart, we shall be able to think for the well being of others and can throw a light which will dispel all kinds of darkness.

This question of loving disposition was asked by King Milinda to Nāgasena for the clarification of the puzzle arose in his mind. Because it has been said by the Lord, that the eleven advantages may be expected by one who practices and makes a habit of loving-kindness towards all beings: he sleeps in peace; he wakes in peace; he dreams no evil dreams; he becomes dear to human beings and to non-human beings; the gods protect him, neither fire, nor poison, nor weapons can harm him; his mind is quickly concentrated his countenance in serene; he dies unconfused and he is reborn in the Brahmā realm.<sup>12</sup>

The King Milinda was puzzled in thinking about the consequence of the prince Sāma, who while dwelling in the cultivation of loving disposition, hit by a poisoned arrow fired by King Piliyakkha. If the statement of the Lord is right then why this miserable consequence has been faced by the prince Sāma. This too, is a double-edge problem, so subtle, so delicate and so profound, that the solving of the problem might well bring out sweat over the body. The King requested Nāgasena just to throw light upon this matter to the accomplishment of the desire of those sons who shall arise hereafter.<sup>13</sup>

Nāgasena tried to solve the problem with the idea of that these eleven virtues of loving - kindness are dependent on love itself and not on the character of the person who practises it. Sāma practised the meditation on loving-kindness all the time. However, while he was collecting water, his mind lapsed from the meditation and at that moment king Piliyakkha shot him, so the arrow was able to hurt him. Just like that it is with the virtue inherent in the felt presence of love that a man has called up in his heart.<sup>14</sup>

Nāgasena was fully strange how the presence of love has the power of warding off all evil states of mind.

So, in fine we may say that the practice of love is productive

of all virtuous conditions of mind both in good and in evil ones. So, all beings, who are in the bonds of conscious existence certainly cultivate the feeling of love - kindness and reap the harvest of great advantage.

In modern time, the idea of love has been propounded by Tagore, Rāmakrishna, Vivekananda, Gandhiji etc, for the reformation of the world revolution which is going on in this world in the absence of pure love and kindness. All the people has been involved themselves in their own self interested work and hate each other when this interest is opposed by somebody. People of the modern world is now going to forget the ideal taught by our predecessors.

The ultimate human destiny is the realisation of the universal in the individual. The ordinary man in his embodied existence is the self, he can realise his true nature by becoming a soul. The self is the narrow egoistic existence of the individual, the *soul* is the existence of the individual as an aspect of the universal. To realise the one's true nature, consciousness has to be extended beyond the ego, the consciousness of the self must make room for soul-consciousness. Worldly wisdom can never be the means of attaining soul consciousness. Intellect may be the proud possession and the tool of the scholar, but it can never give us the insight into the nature of reality. Intellect can count the petals, classify the scent and

describe the colour of the rose, but that is not knowing the rose because these do not constitute the roseness of the rose. Just as the knowledge of the theory of music is not music, so the intellectual view of things is not the real view.

The unity that is the goal of life is not partial, but all-comprehensive, and therefore, it can be attained not through intellect but through vision. Vision means sudden outburst of spirituality from within.

Now the question arises how we may be able to gain this vision. Tagore answers the question in one word - *Love*. It is only through love that our consciousness can be enlarged. The soul has been described as a lover always in search of the beloved. The union will be possible only when soul intensifies his love. Love has been defined as comprehension. Comprehension is comprehending "all" in a unity. In love the sense of difference is obliterated. Love identifies oneself with the object of one's love, and the discovery of oneself outside his own self is a source of joy. Therefore, love is joy. So long as 'I', 'me', and 'mine' continue to guide man, he cannot be able to enjoy the taste of love. In the king of the dark chamber the queen sees the king only when she gives up her egoistic pride. Love is the highest faculty of soul because by the exercise of this faculty one transcends the boundaries of the limited self. To be one with the

all (*sarvānubhūti*), one must reach that summit of consciousness which is love; it is through love that one comes into intimate touch with others, love must be distinguished from attachment. Attachment centres round the ego, and has a motive or a purpose behind it. True love does not seek to satisfy any egoistic motive. Love presupposes sacrifice. Love and sacrifice go together. This is an important character, because in the act of love, with which man begins his spiritual journey, giving up and sacrificing of all personal considerations constitutes the first step. Our experience of life tells us that love begins with pain and sorrow but this pain is able to bring out the secrets of man's innermost being.

Man can conveniently begin by trying to have a sympathetic attitude towards others. It is true that generally our love for children, friends and near ones prevents us from extending our love to others, yet the love for the near ones is a step onwards, and the process of sacrifice starts here.

To work for all would mean the recognition of the metaphysical unity of all and to work under that recognition. This would no longer remain a life of the finite, it would be living in the infinite. Actions for others gives a man freedom in the outside world, and that is a prelude to his finding freedom within.

According to Tagore, the realisation of the Infinite can be

possible through the Realisation '*in Action*', Realisation *in Love* and Realisation *of Beauty*. Tagore also talks about *Spiritual Yoga*. Yoga is taken in the sense of a discipline that demands sacrifice and renunciation. Renunciation consists in one's giving up of his possessions and in his sacrificing his egoistic impulses. This means that the lower aspect of man has to be raised higher - made more perfect. He clearly says, "The renunciation is not in the negation of the self, but in the dedication of it."<sup>15</sup>

This *yoga*, therefore, is "the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love."<sup>16</sup>

Love or joy is knowledge in its completeness. Love is the only form of experience that comprehends unity.

Recently Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekananda have tried their level best to abolish the difference between man to man with the help of the instrument of love with each other. There is no distinction of caste and creed. All the beings are the manifestation of God. We should not hate anybody so that one's inner soul is insulted. By virtue of love we can win the whole world. He himself proved the fact by his own action. When the India was suffering from so many kinds of diseases and the *Sanātan Dharma* was in the position of

the setting sun, that setting sun is again revived and that starts to shine in the sky with its original brightness. This difficult task was performed by Vivekananda with the help of strong mental determination and his deep and pure love for the countrymen or the poor Indian. He came to feel that India, in spite of its rich spiritual heritage and very strong cultural history, had not been able to root out poverty, weakness and social evils. He strongly felt the need of bringing about a spiritual revolution, which, he also realised, required a very strong spiritual leadership.

At that time he came to know that the "*Parliament of Religion*" was going to meet at Chicago. He decided to go there and to participate in the meet. What happened there is today a household story. He addressed the American people, with a very sweet tone, "All my brothers and sisters of America" and with the pronouncing of these very words, American people whole-heartedly congratulated him and the Parliament of Religion enabled Vivekananda to assure the spiritual leadership of the Indian people.

Deep-rooted feeling of love towards the Indian people compelled him to overcome many obstacles which were prevailing in the social order. He used to say, "He preyth best, who loveth best. All things both great and small." Even the smallest things in the world is nothing but the manifestation of the Infinite or Brahman. So in

fine, we may say that by following the idea of love and by its cultivation, we can gain the best in the world.

According to Gandhi, good consists in doing good to others, it would involve sacrificing one's personal motives for the good of others. This means that - self-transcendence or love constitutes the essence of morality. Love in the opinion of Gandhi is Divine; it makes performance of duty not only a convenience; but also a duty. But love at times tends to be blind. This may lead to dogmatism and even to fanaticism. Full knowledge of love is required to guide oneself towards the path of morality. Love in ignorance tends to become sensuous and narrow, knowledge will break its bonds and barriers. Therefore, D.M. Dutta observes, 'the path to the realisation of the True self or God, therefore, lies through the love of others and the performance of duties towards others as love demands.'<sup>17</sup>

So, the importance of the questions of Milinda and the reply given by Nāgasena can be widely accepted with the discussion of the idea of love and kindness towards all, which is as ancient as the beginning of the society. Science has discovered many deadly weapons, but the instrument of love is more deadly than these weapons if we can apply it properly at the proper time.

## FAITH

From the standpoint of rigid Philosophy, there is a conflict between faith and reason. Whereas reason demands explanation for whatever we know or believe in, faith cajoles us into believing without apparent reason.

However, this is an extreme case. There need not be a conflict between faith and reason. The two can have two different domains and each can make room for the other. Absolutely irrational things need not be believed in; and what our heart accepts easily may have different reason than dry logic. The questions of King Milinda have delved deep into the problem of faith and come out with wonderful insights.

The King Milinda asked Nāgasena regarding the characteristic mark of faith. The reply was given by Nāgasena very easily by using simply two words, "Tranquillisation and aspiration". Faith springs up in the heart so it must have to cross the various hindrances like lust, malice, mental sloth, spiritual pride and doubt. When the heart is free from these hindrances, it becomes clear and undisturbed like the peaceful surface of the stream.

Next, aspiration as the mark of faith is the perception of the heart of others which have been set free in a very excellent way just

like a leap upon the fruit. It is the attainment of *Arahatship*. It is the stage of applying himself to the attainment of what has not reached, experienced or realised just like a man who crosses over the stream firmly and aspires the other people to take the risk or hazard in doing so. A man, who knowing exactly his own strength and power should gird himself firmly and with a spring, land himself on the other side. Nāgasena referred to the King, the saying of the Blessed one in *Samyutta Nikāya* :

*“By faith he crosses over the stream,  
By earnestness the sea of life;  
By steadfastness all grief he stills,  
By wisdom is he Purified.”<sup>18</sup>*

In modern times also we can interpret the concept of faith in a different philosophical manner. To Vivekananda the highest ideal of our life is the attainment of Good. We must dispel doubt from our mind. Doubtful mind can create troubles regarding honesty and chestity of a truthful person also. When the doubt of a person goes upto the extreme, that person is regarded as psychologically imbalanced. But doubt is not always negative. It has got some positive side also. Now-a-days a simple and honest person is deceived everywhere. So honesty does not mean that a person will be cheated.

So in this sense some kind of doubt should be there in all minds. Doubt arises due to the complexity of the world. But inspite of all complex surroundings, a man should be doubtless in respect of good qualities which are inherent quality of the self.

In view of Vivekananda we should be determined in the attainment of truth. Firm determination or belief of the self is the best quality by which we can regain everything. With this dictates he aspires all the nation to regain their lost Independence.

So the concept of faith in the Buddhist philosophy has its much importance in modern time also. In order to lead a smooth and peaceful life we should abolish doubts which arise due to the ignorant attitude of mind.

Doubts also arise due to the ingratification of our sense organs. When these obstacles are removed, we can smoothly perceive the Truth and Faith reveals itself in its original form which is the Master of life. When a man becomes the winner of enemies, he is called *Arhat* in Buddhist philosophy. *Arhat* means who has conquered all the enemies in the battle of life and wins the heart of each and everybody. Enemy does not mean only the external enemy but also the internal enemy which is more important to overcome. According to Hinduism these are called "*Ṣaḍ Ripu*". These six enemies are the great obstacles in the path of attaining '*Mokṣa*' or *Nirvāṇa* in Buddha

philosophy. So these enemies should be uprooted first so that we can see clearly the reality. When our original vision is revived, we can develop ourself to the stage of *arhatship* which is nothing but the destruction of evil qualities and attainment of finer qualities. To lead a peaceful and tranquil state of mind is nothing but the stage of "*Sthitaprajña*" in the *Bhagavadgītā* where all kinds of desires have been extinguished and the self reveals itself like a shining Sun.

Next important question was asked by the king regarding the characteristic mark of *perseverance*. The reply was given by Nāgasena that the rendering of support is the mark of perseverance. We should try to cultivate the good qualities and put away evil ones, puts away what is wrong and developes what is right or good, so that we can keep ourselves pure.<sup>19</sup>

In modern time, also we can interpret perseverance in a slight different way. Its significance lies in the fact that without this quality of mind we cannot attain anything good in our life. In order to attain the three Ideals of life we must have to proceed through great patient and perseverance. Not only the three Ideals of life but also to secure any kind of good results or to create anything we must have to possess this quality. Almost all the persons who are now become immortal, have achieved success in life due to perseverance. Without this good quality the man will lead a static life. He will be inactive in

every respect. When there is no action, the whole world will lose its dynamic quality. Creation will be destroyed for ever. These are the mortal and mental qualities which together make *Arhatship* in Buddhism. The internal significance of all these good qualities stand in the fact that a man can be perfect and good if he cultivates good qualities with perseverance and he may attain Truth, the Highest Ideal of life or the *Summun Bonum* of life.

Next inter-related question asked by the king regarding the marks of wisdom. In order to gain wisdom a man should be enlightened. When wisdom or knowledge is attained, it will dispel the darkness of ignorance and radiance of light will arise and make the intelligence to shine forth. With the help of intelligence we can clearly see the 'Four Noble Truth'.

## WISDOM

Philosophy is, in its essence, the quest of reality. In the attempt to determine what is real, one has to choose, in the first instance, between the percipient self and the things that it perceives. This choice may seem to be purely metaphysical, but sooner or later it becomes a moral choice and one which is decisive of the chooser's destiny. The decision as to whether the self or the outward world is real, rests with the self not with outward world. It is I who have made the choice between myself and the world that surrounds me; the man who can allow himself to say : "I can see the outward world; therefore it is real, but I cannot see myself; therefore I am non-existent"; is obviously the victim of a singular confusion of thought. It is sometimes said that the idealist starts with himself and never gets to the outward world. There are certain dialectical developments of Idealism of which this criticism may perhaps hold good; but as a general criticism of idealism, it is, I think, entirely untrue.<sup>20</sup>

To prove the reality of what alone enables one to prove reality is, for obvious reason impossible. But the universe would melt into a dream-world if I could not place myself at the centre of it; and my inability to prove, or even begin to prove, that myself is real, matters little so long a Nature herself constrains me - with or without the consent of my consciousness - to postulate its real.

For Indian thought, then, which started with acceptance of the individual self, Brahman - the universal soul or self - was and is alone real. The first thing that we can say about him is that he is unknown and unknowable. In the world which centres in me, it is I, the knower who is unknown and unknowable. It is the same in the cosmos. We must either keep silence when we meditate on Brahman, or speak of him as the Upaniṣads habitually do in the language of paradox and negation. He is afar and yet near. All opposites are harmonised in him, - being and non-being, wisdom and ignorance, right and wrong.

A devoted person with the help of clearest wisdom can perceive the impermanency of all beings and things and the suffering of individuality, and the absence of any soul.

Wisdom is like a lamp which dispels the darkness, brings light and makes everything visible. Ignorance which is the root cause of birth and death will be abolished. With the help of knowledge we can clear up our mind and reveal its inherentness which is basically good. Due to Ignorance we lose our actual vision of observing anything rightly.

Ignorance has been interpreted by most of the Indian schools of thought as the cause of miseries. In Buddha philosophy it has been regarded the root of sufferings. The chain of Rebirth arises

due to this reason. We are surrounded by so many worldly pleasure, happiness and miseries at the same time. If we want to remove our sufferings we must know the Four Noble Truth. With the knowledge of Four Noble Truth, and by following the Eight Fold path we can reach to the goal of permanent happiness. In Advaita Vedānta, Ignorance is nothing but *Avidyā*. Due to *Avidyā* we born in this world and think it a permanent stage. In this respect the greatest Dramatic Shakespeare's opinion may be quoted. Shakespeare regards this world as a stage, where we, the human being, are the best actors. When we return our permanent home our acting will come to an end. So in order to know the permanent home we must acquire knowledge or wisdom. When true knowledge is born in mind then everything will appear to us as impermanent. True vision can provide us with peaceful state of mind which is nothing but *Mokṣa* or *Nirvāṇa*.

Sankarāchārya also regards this world as an illusion or *Māyā*. Everything in this world is *Śūṇya* or void. This voidness or *Śūṇyatā* can be realised only through the true knowledge about Reality.

Wisdom in the version of Nāgasena is nothing but the putting end of the evil disposition, which has its significance in the deepest sense of the term. The person who has intelligence, has also wisdom. Both are the same.<sup>21</sup> If reasoning ceases, knowledge remains. To attain liberation or to know anything of this world correctly true

knowledge should be acquired. Ignorance is nothing but the curtain which always veils the true nature of the things. When this curtain is removed from our eyesight, then we will be regarded as a perfect human being due to having true vision. We can attain this perfection in this world with the help of knowledge. It is like a lamp, which will illuminate the darkness through its light. Though there are seven kinds of wisdom, according to Nāgasena, yet only the single instrument i.e., instrument of the "Investigation of the Truth" can unveil the dark clouds after appearing before the mind and can illuminate the truths which is the ideal or *Summum bonum* of life.

## DEATH

Birth and death are indeed the great antipodes in the career of a living being; and death, 'The Great Migration', as the Tibetans call : is indeed a change that has struck and even confused the *minds* of the high and low from the dawn of time to the present day. This change, along with birth and old age, constitutes, according to Buddhism, one of the prime miseries of life, and we are over and over again reminded in the sacred canon of the sorrowful fact and death is the end of life *Maranāhtaṃ hi Jivitaṃ*. In technical language of Buddhist philosophy the change involved in Death implies the impermanence of life ... appearance. In other words the tenet of the impermanence of the life - period denotes among living beings.

Death is one of man's eternal problems. Death is the anti-thesis of life. Man is faced with perplexities and despairs in different phases of his existence, but in the face of death, his lack of adjustment is the most profound. Death marks the termination of all adjustments in our lives. In human life there is no other experience so universal, inevitable and intense as the painful and fearful experience of death. Death is a universal fact; because it is the common lot of every living being of the world. Death is inevitable in the sense that it is unavoidable, none can escape from it. In the *Gītā* (II.27) Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that for one who is born, death is certain and certain is birth

for the one that dies. (*Jātasya hi dhrubo mṛtyur dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca*). Man can never be at rest even if his physical needs are met as they do not result in abiding spiritual happiness. Life's transitoriness will continue to disturb his mind; the heart of man cannot be content unless he has a vision of eternity; it is the intense fear of death that creates and stimulates intense longing for eternal life. There is no more powerful impulse than the one to live. The stronger or the more intimate consciousness of the death, the more inward is the life. We are afraid of death when one erroneously identifies oneself with the ups and downs of the limiting adjuncts of body, mind, senses, intellect and the ego which conceal the essential nature of the Self. Desires for worldly objects are the main fetters that bind us to the painful vicious circle of birth and death. Freedom from the fear of death comes from the freedom from all desires. Whereas the body is subject to disintegration and destruction, the Self is not. Once we realise that the Self or true 'I' is the unborn and undying spirit in us, the fear of death will not arise. Man's perfection lies in the direct realisation of this truth.

Self-realisation will bring the conviction that everything is dear not for its own sake but for the sake of the self. In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (IV 5.6), Yājñavalkya tells his wife Maitreyī that the wife is not dear because she is a wife, the husband is not dear because of

being a husband, the son is not dear because of being a son; all is dear because of the Self. (*ātmanas tu kāmāya sarvam priyam bhavati*).<sup>22</sup> So the Self is to be seen, heard, and meditated upon; and when the intrinsic nature of the Self is known, not only everything else is known but one also conquers death, for one attains immortality.

In *Dīgha-nikayā* (Sutta 22) Buddha gives detailed instructions of meditation. Regarding the body, for example, one should always meditate or remember that the body is only a combination of the four elements (earth, water, air and fire), that it is filled with flesh, bone, skin, dirt, bile, blood, pus etc. and that it is ultimately eaten by dogs and vultures. From such intense meditation on death detachment from all objects that bind man to the world or indifference (*vairāgya*) towards mundane life will result; and thereby it ultimately helps the aspirant in the attainment of the highest goal of life, namely Liberation (*nirvāṇa*) (The Dhammapada, X. 129).

According to Plato, philosophy is the practice of death as he knows how to die with ease. Deep contemplation on death enables a man in separating the soul from the body or sensuous objects which hide the soul's vision of the Ideas from our view. It helps the aspirant to fly from the world of sense into the calm of philosophic contemplation leading ultimately to the apprehension of reality.

Philosophy becomes useless when it does not solve the vital problems of death and suffering. An interest (*jijñāsā*) in philosophical enquiry commences the very moment when an attempt is made to know what death is. It is the query of death that initiates a man for the search of Truth. It is the starting-point of all philosophy and *sādhana*. Philosophy begins with deep contemplation of death and ends in the solution of the question of death - that is, spiritual realisation. Any kind of *sādhana* is practised only for attaining immortality i.e. freedom from death. Whatever may be the position of philosophy or of the metaphysics, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world; there shall be faith in some higher Power. The secret of death can be understood only when one has the realisation of or knowledge of the Self. The subtle body persists throughout its different incarnations till its final dissolution is brought about by knowledge. One must be first released from the bondage of the body to be able to realise the Self more closely. The annihilation of the ego which is achieved by renouncing everything that constitutes the ego. When the ego is annihilated, there is no more transmigration or fear of death.

Another important question was asked by the king, "Why all men tremble at punishment, all are afraid of death but not *Arhat* who has passed beyond all fear."<sup>23</sup> The problem has been solved by

Nāgasena in a simple manner by saying that *Arhat* has removed all causes of fear and the ordinary people are still infatuated with the delusion of self, and cast down by pleasures and pains. To the *Arhat*, all kinds of future existence have been destroyed, good and evil have been ceased, ignorance has been demolished, all sin has been burnt and all worldly conditions have been overcome. Death is a condition which is afraid of those who have not seen the truth. All beings who are not free from sin are afraid of death. Death is a thing disliked by all beings. But this is true for all. Death is ultimate truth. It is common to all and must be accepted by all.

In spite of knowing the nature of truth we are afraid of Death. But a person who is beyond all the state of sorrows and sufferings, pleasure and pain, good and evil and has realised the Four Noble Truth is beyond the fear of Death.

In the language of Dr. Radhakrishnan, Death is nothing but the change of one body to another but the Self remains the same just like torn pieces of cloths are changed and a new one is taken at the cost of the old. So we should not think about the inevitable thing, which we must have to face. *Yama*, the Master of Death, will visit each and everybody. That's why Death is called the Great Master, who teaches the best thing in this world.

If we want to remove ourselves from this chain of Birth and Death and to attain *Nirvāṇa*, the process of Rebirth will be come to an end.

Besides the above important questions, there are so many questions put forward by the King Milinda and the problem was solved by the Monk Nāgasena in a very intelligent manner with appropriate simile and having a philosophical importance. However, in various ways Nāgasena closes the discussion of the Beginning of Time, Perception, Consciousness, Memory, Intelligence and Wisdom, Body etc. The concept of change, emergence of the new and endless progress was introduced in Indian philosophical thinking. The mentality of "change according to times" which is now a part of Indian culture is the contribution of this discussion.

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