



The philosophy of Indian culture: An analysis

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Abstract

Western thinkers defined philosophy as a science concerned with the ultimate cause of all phenomena in the universe. On the other hand, the Indian seers saw philosophy as the search and realization of the whole truth of life and existence. According to them, it is not only a spiritual or intellectual quest, but also a conscious exploration of life. The purpose of philosophy is to guide and enrich life. But the fulfillment of life is not achieved only through contemplation of truth and existence. The Vedic tradition is full of claims that philosophical impulses ultimately lead to the realization of truth. It may seem a little strange that India should be a secular nation when our culture is deeply rooted in spiritual values. In India, religion refers to the inner experience that reveals to the mind the true meaning and purpose of life and is the very soul of our culture. This paper focuses on the central features of Indian culture as it evolved from its origins to its current status.

Keywords: Indian culture, spiritualism, materialism, consciousness, truth

Introduction

Materialistic life in the West is based on the extroverted assumption that humans are simply a combination of intellect and senses. Western intellectuals devoted themselves to acquiring relative knowledge of nature and providing material means of subsistence. Philosophy there follows the example of science and limits its field of study primarily to perceptible nature. However, relative knowledge that ignores absolute values is incomplete and even erroneous. This mistake was made by Western countries, resulting in increased chaos and insecurity despite advanced lifestyles and wealth. Western countries have no solution to this problem. According to Western psychology, achieving complete peace of mind is virtually impossible. On the other hand, the Eastern way of life, based on introverted values, has relatively little knowledge about nature. Over time, the Eastern knowledge of the Absolute degenerated and the way of life was transformed. And lately, the wave of Western relative knowledge that has swept over the East has made human life in this hemisphere as confusing and discordant as that in the West. Therefore, the solution to the current psychological problems of the world is that the field of study of philosophy of life must be the essence of the whole and the absolute truth. Scientific research based on relative knowledge of relative natural phenomena should be combined with the search for absolute existence. To meet this universal need, many Indian philosophers and social scientists proposed their own theories based on the integration of the creativity of Indian philosophy and the relative knowledge of the West.

Philosophy of Indian Culture

According to Indian philosophy, despite their outward diversity, there is a fundamental unity at the heart of all religions and philosophies, each reflecting or partially showing the truth, or because it represents one of the forms of infinite truth. What is needed today is a universal religion and holistic philosophy that emerges from the synthesis of the various religious and philosophical systems that humanity has developed over the years. A holistic and

universal civilization also requires the integration of different cultures. Ancient Greek culture embodied the ideal of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram'. Modern Western culture has improved living conditions through science and industry. Ancient Chinese culture tried to solve life's problems from a social perspective. The basis of Chinese thought was that "human beings are social beings." Ancient Indian culture had the self (soul) as its main theme, following the eternal Vedic maxim "Atmanam Vidhi" (Know your soul). Therefore, these four major cultures developed different aspects of human personality. The Greeks, modern Europeans, and ancient Chinese and Indians developed aesthetic sensibilities, living conditions, social environments, and psychological forces. Their synthesis will form the basis of humanity's comprehensive culture. For example, Swami Vivekananda advanced his spiritual research in this direction. Although all his philosophical literature is written in English, its style is purely Indian. It is based on the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad His Gita, Tantrashastras, and incorporates Western scientific thought. Its integrated philosophical system is universal. Being spiritual and yogic, it recognizes the benefits of intellectual pursuits and does not encourage abandonment of worldly life. It not only collects the principles of various philosophical systems, but also has its own principles, the most important of which are:

- Self-preservation, self-repetition and self-multiplication are the predominant instincts of all material existence. Life is the animated association of matter, mind and spirit. Spirit is eternal entity. Matter and mind are its workings. Spirit is concealed and has to reveal in the process of cosmic evolution. Mind and matter are the means by which it seeks to reveal itself. This is the yogic relationship among matter, mind, spirit and life.
- There is perpetual evolution in the cosmos. From matter to vegetation, from vegetation to animal and from animal to man, in this sequence the creation evolved. But vegetation could not have emanated out of matter had life not been inherent in the latter, because it is not possible for consciousness to evolve from

unconsciousness. The evolution of life in matter and of mind in life.

- The atoms of matter are a dynamic congregation of electric charges, like solar system. Their fundamental principle is electronic energy. Inertness is merely their apparent characteristic. And the basis of that electronic energy is some conscious force. In accordance with the Law of Involution that conscious force adopts self-forgetfulness voluntarily. In due course such self-forgetfulness becomes the basis of self-fulfillment and evolution progresses. 'Brahman' ('the Divine' in the terminology of Sri Aurobindo) is the ultimate principle of the universe. He manifests Himself in the cosmos-in matter, in vegetation, in animals, and in man. Matter is inert, vegetation is endowed with vital consciousness in a dormant stage, the consciousness of animals is characterized by sensitivity only, and that of man by the additional mental faculty of contemplation. But as yet the consciousness of man is extrovert and imperfect. The goal of evolution is perfection, i.e. an integral life, individually as well as in collectivity.
- Man has now reached such a level of consciousness that if he aspires for the integrated Supramental consciousness with the full force of his three-fold yogic discipline of 'Karma-Bhakti-Jana' (Action, Devotion and Knowledge), he can accelerate his own as well as the universal evolution to a large extent. Man has open to him a choice among three kinds of life the ordinary material existence, a life of mental activity, and the unchanging spiritual beatitude. But he can combine these from, resolve their discord into a harmonious rhythm and so create in himself the whole god-head, the perfect man, the 'Supramental Being'.
- All activities of the world are carried out for the sake of joy. The entire mobile as well as immobile creation is an immense expanse of joy. But then the question arises, why is sorrow experienced in it? Sri Aurobindo's answer is that the 'Sat-Chit-Ananda' (Truth absolute, Consciousness absolute and Bliss absolute) Divine Power has created the universe by means of self-division. The famous dictum of the Upanishad 'Ekohambahusyama' (I am one, let me multiply) is indicative of this supreme act. The purpose of that self-division might have been to cause variation and then to enjoy re-self unification with the intermediary variant which comprises of the entire universe. Joy and sorrow are the characteristics of the particular situations arising from the self-unification of the Divine with the variant which constitutes the evolutionary system of the universe. According to the Upanishads the universe has been created out of bliss, is sustained in bliss and is ultimately dissolved in bliss. The transitory sorrow, which has got an external appearance only, is a great preceptor and catalytic accelerator of humanity.
- If everything in the universe is manifestation of the Divine and He is perfect in Himself then why is the creation imperfect and why are human beings ignorant? The answer is that the imperfection of the creation can be the result of self-limitation or self-division through the will of the divine, because the Infinite has got the power to become finite. And the purpose of the imperfect Creation is to maintain the order of evolution. Spiritual experience stipulates that the world is merely a

play of the Divine. There is no imperfection or ignorance in Him. They are the relative characteristics of the mind-set of man.

- Human has created a civilization which has become too ponderous for his limited mental capacity. It has come to be a perilous servitor of his disconcerted ego and carvings. There are three fundamental entities of nature viz. matter, life and mind. Due to its extrovert attitudes science could know only matter, and could not sufficiently perceive life. It has almost no knowledge of mind and consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says, "Son of man, thou has crowned thy life with the flowers that are scentless". But as and when science will become aware of life the present civilization will undergo changes, and when knowledge of the mind also will be acquired by science the human civilization will be completely transformed. The synthesis of science and Yoga is necessary for the accomplishment of this object, because Yoga is the link between science and spirituality. The tremendous inner creative energy of man can brought into play through Yoga.
- Human personality comprises four entities, viz. physical body, vital force, mind and the psychic. The first three form the external personality, while the conscious individual soul (whom Sri Aurobindo has termed 'psychic') constitutes the inner personality of man. Further, there are five fields of consciousness viz. inconscient, subconscient, conscient, environmental conscient and super-conscient. In reality there matter consciousness exists in a certain degree although there may be no awareness in it. The sub-conscient is a dissippable realm of egoistic emotions. According to Sigmond Freud nine-tenth of the total human consciousness is sub-conscient and inconscient. The inconscient and sub-conscient realms are marked by large store-house of all past experiences exercising enormous influence on our present behaviour and future planning.

The conscient in the field of normal experience which is related to intellectual sentiments. The environmental consciousness is a sort of individual atmosphere or protecting envelope in which we feel and catch psychological vibrations before they enter into us. By the practice of Yoga we can stop them on the way and reject them. This unique characteristic of the environmental conscientis due to the fact that it is the manifestation and externalized effect of our inner mind and inner mind remains in direct contact with the universal mind. The super conscient (i.e. realm above the mind) is the focus of interest in Yoga. Its main characteristics are the ascending stages of harmony and perfection, as indicated below:-

The higher mind

It is a luminous thought-mind which acquires knowledge immediately, and not through the medium of reasoning. But it is yet a heavy mental substance and catches the light from above "drop by drop" and dissolves it in itself.

The Illumined Mind

It is the region of spiritual light, and not of thoughts or ideas. It acquires knowledge in a stream and not "drop by drop." The access to this level of consciousness is accompanied by a spontaneous blossoming of creative

capacities, particularly in the poetic field. Sri Aurobindo says: "I have seen both in myself and in others a sudden flowering of capacities in every kind of activity comes by the opening of consciousness".

The Intuitive Mind

In this region the mental substance is quite clear and transparent. With intuition comes a special joy. Intuition is knowledge by a flash of identity. The subject knows the object by experiencing his identification with it.

The Overmind

It is the rarely-attained summit of the human mind. It is cosmic consciousness but without the extinction of the individual entity. From this plane of super-consciousness all religions and prophets come into being. In this region knowledge is no longer the diffused light of the Illumined Mind nor the isolated flashes of the Intuitive Mind, but "an ocean of stable lightning", as the Veda describes it.

The Supermind

This highest level is attained when the mind is completely transcended. It is the Supramental Truth-consciousness which is fully aware of the infinite possibilities of the 'Sat-Chit-Ananda' and works them out. It has never before been brought into action in the world, although in individual cases human consciousness has reached this level. There are eight levels of Being viz. (i) matter (ii) vital ('Prana') (iii) mind (iv) psychic (v) Supermind (vi) 'Ananda' (bliss) (vii) 'Chit' (knowledge) and (viii) 'Sat (Truth). They are indicative of evolution in the ascending order from (i) to (viii) and of involution in their reverse order from (viii) to (i). The being of the animal is its vital body. In it the mind is in a very elementary state. In the normal evolution of man the mind has reached a high state. In the next stage the psychic will be revealed. After psychicization will come the stage of spiritualization and then eventually of supramentalization. This order of the human evolution is 'sin qua non'. Nature itself is striving for it. However, through the discipline of Integral Yoga the evolution of the entire humanity, along with one's individual evolution, can be accelerated. The human personality is an evolutionary entity. It is not a blank sheet even at the time of birth. It appears in the world with many inclinations and aptitudes, from its past incarnations. It then vanishes for eventual rebirth after some more evolution in life. Once a psychic (individual soul) takes birth as a human being its rebirth also normally occurs in the human race. On leaving the physical body the psychic rests for a certain specified period (which varies for different individual souls) in its inner realm, after passing through vital and mental regions along with its subtle body. There it digests its experiences of the past life and chalks out the outline of the new personality to be adopted by it in the next life. In the meantime, due to some special pull it can again enter the vital region may be full of unmitigated suffering if its vital carvings are still strong. Sri Aurobindo wrote several books on his system of philosophy, the chief of which are 'The life Divine' and the epic 'Savitri'. Although Sri Aurobindo had denied that he was a philosopher and the Mother said that his teaching is not philosophy but "a decisive action direct from the Supreme," the Truth revealed by

Him in these two master-pieces are termed as 'philosophy' in common usage. Sri Aurobindo has defined 'philosophy'

thus: "All philosophy is concerned with the relations between two things, the fundamental Truth of existence and the forms in which existence presents itself to our experience." The gist of his philosophy is that in the cosmic evolution life initially became manifest in inert matter and some consciousness was evolved. Thus vegetation came into being. Then oviparous and subsequently viviparous creatures were brought into existence. Eventually man appeared on the cosmic arena. However, the process of evolution continues and man is not its final stage. In the great drama of the creation consciousness of the physical body was first evolved, then vital-consciousness and then mind-consciousness. The man of mind-consciousness behaves with the sense of ego, but the being of the enlightened consciousness of Supermind will act only for the good of the collectivity with an egoless attitude.

Consciousness in Indian Culture

The concept of consciousness and its accelerated evolution is rooted in the ancient Vedic lore and the scriptures of almost all spiritual adventures of the world in some form or the other. In the present century this doctrine and its yogic technique have been unraveled by many contemporary Indian social thinkers in a unique manner to suit the modern intellectual mould of mankind. Western thinkers have described consciousness in abstract terms as the faculty of knowing, and the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings. On the other hand Indian seers found in their inner perception that consciousness is a living force which is capable of being evolved to higher planes. It is concrete as an electric current, but the main difference between the two is that while consciousness is an animate and growing force the electric current is not such. The Vedas mentioned consciousness as 'Agni', the mystic fire, and ancient Yogis described it as 'Jeevan Shakti', the force of life. In Tibetan Yoga it has been termed 'Silver Cord' and several disciplines have been prescribed for its infinite expansion. There are three main stream in a living body-blood, vital force ('Prana') and consciousness. Their main flow is either downwards or diffused throughout the body. However, the ancient Yogis discovered in the laboratory of their spiritual realization that, if the flow of these three streams is turned upwards to the apex of the head, the human personality acquires tremendous power physical, mental and spiritual. For this purpose the Yogis devised special techniques, e.g. 'Shirsasana' and other postures for the blood, 'Pranayama' for the vital force and Yogic disciplines for the consciousness. By constant yogic practice the individual consciousness not only rise upward but can expand beyond the gross physical body. On the other hand, consciousness is capable of being evolved, in quality so to say, upto the highest Supramental level, within the human body or outside it, in a infinite silence. And then peace, power, freedom, knowledge and bliss become manifest. Therefore the yogis came to the supreme conclusion that the true evolution of man does not lie in becoming more and more intelligent or more and more saintly, but in being more and more conscious. The Vedic Rishis discovered that the fundamental components of the entire creation are two, viz., 'Akasha' (ether or space) and 'Prana' (energy). Out of Prana all forces of the universe have emerged. Motion and thought are manifestation of Prana. The ultimate source of Akasha and Prana being the same primeval power ('Maha Shakti', the dynamic aspect of the Divine, in the terminology of Sri

Aurobindo), these two are mutually convertible, i.e., Akasha into Prana and vice versa. And consciousness is the manifestation of that primeval Power in the universe, as on the physical plane sunshine is manifestation of the sun. According to the Mundaka Upanishad "By energism of consciousness Brahman is massed, from that, matter is born and from matter, life and mind and the worlds". Consciousness can be evolved to act on matter and transform it. The ultimate conversion of matter into consciousness and of consciousness into matter is the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Internal Yoga. Modern science has also arrived at the similar conclusion that atom, which is the most minute indivisible form of all substances is composed of space, in which electronic charges move with tremendous velocity. Einstein has proved that matter and energy are mutually convertible and that matter is condensed energy. According to Sri Aurobindo and eminent Indian Scholar, Consciousness is the self aware force of existence. It is a universal dynamic and creative energy, a presence without which nothing exists in the universe. In inert and insentient matter consciousness exists in the dormant state of nescience or unawareness, although matter appears to be inconscient. In vegetation and plants it exists in a sleeping or subconscious state. In animals it is the primary stage and in man in a further evolutionary stage. But man is not the last rung of the ladder of evolution and is heading towards the next stage, that of Supramental being or Supermind. The further evolution (or transformation, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology) of the consciousness of man to the Supramental consciousness can be accelerated by the 'Sadhana' of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. In relation to the human body the various functions of consciousness are: According to the Swami Vivekananda mind is an instrument of action and formation, and not an instrument of knowledge. Spiritual life is a vast field of the evolution of consciousness. Knowledge comes from a higher consciousness which is evolved from the depth of the soul. In this form it is termed "Environmental consciousness" or 'Circumconscient'. Various Yogic have also described it as 'Aura' and 'Etheric body'. According to Sri Aurobindo, if one becomes aware of the consciousness one can erect a protective envelope around oneself, so that any vibrant (of lust, anger, violence etc.) Gets dissolved in it like smoke, instead of entering one's body and harming it or moving it to action. Even the uplifted arm of an assassin or the leap of a snake or tiger can be stopped by it, as was witnessed on several occasions in the life of Gautama Buddha. The circum-conscient can also be evolved as sufficiently sensitive to disclose to us a person's approach before hand or make us avoid a mishap just at the moment it is going to overtake us. Science has not been able to explain the real cause of phenomenon of gravitation. This can be explained by Yoga quite rationally as due to the presence of consciousness in each atom. To cite another instance, an American scientist, engaged in research into the nature and working of unicellular bacilli, discovered that although the organism consisted only of the nucleus, the protoplasm and the cellular wall, it was attracted by and drawn towards certain substances. During the seventeen years of his research he could not discover any scientific reason for this phenomenon. According to the Swami Vivekananda, there is "presence of the Divine in the atom". God is Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss). The unknown entity which the scientist failed to detect is

consciousness (the 'Sat-Chit') which animates the one-celled organism. Sigmund Freud reiterated the conjecture of the Vedic Rishis that ninetenth of the consciousness of man pertains to the inconscient and subconscious realms. This vast store-house of past experiences and latent knowledge is utilized for accelerate evolution of consciousness by Yogic techniques which have been devised by Sri Aurobindo after deep research of disciplines of the East as well as the West. Thus what would have evolved normally in the universe in millions of years can be attained in few centuries; what would have taken innumerable lives to perform and achieve can be realized by the individual aspirant even in his present birth. And the summit of such evolution is the manifestation of the Supramental consciousness and the appearance of the race of Supramental Beings on the earth.

Conclusion

Human has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding. Indian culture still contains in her culture and philosophy the key to reconciliation. The real import of a culture is revealed by the orientation it gives to the way of life and the type of men it moulds by its manifold creative facets. The essence of spiritual dimensions of Indian culture is wisdom. The concept of spiritual unity of all existence in Indian culture broadened the religious outlook of India people and fostered inter religious harmony. The Iranians, Greeks, the Arabs, the Mongols and finally the Europeans – all have contributed to the enrichment of Indian culture. All major religions of the world have also poured their ideas and visions into the stream of the cultural heritage of India. A science oriented spiritualized culture of India will help to make a room for new field of research on physical sciences and social sciences.

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