



## Indian Philosophy in Context: A Socio-cultural Anatomization on Indian Religion

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### Abstract:

The Indian philosophy is as old as India the country itself. And the concept of culture and society took shape with the hands of different Indian philosophies. The way Indian culture and society are seen today is because of these philosophies which make shape the so diversified multicultural nation. Most of the philosophies have history of secular births, but they never go secular, rather they were on their way very often clothed with religious identities. The earliest figures Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Shri Chaitanya who are known to pave the paths of the Indian philosophies spread their ideas with hardly any intention to distinct their ideas by the name of the religiosity. And afterwards their ideas got concretized within a particular religious framework. The modern figures Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhiji, B. R.Ambedkar propagate the contemporary Indian philosophies with no particular direction of any religiosity, and later their thoughts got confined with the colour of religions. This paper will study how the Indian philosophies got religionized, focusing on various Indian cultures are being emerged with the religionized philosophies. This study also aims at to explore the journey of the Indian philosophies from their very births to the present century with a special attention to the modern period.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, culture, society, nation, religionization.

India is a land of huge diversities. From every point of view, its vast land and astonishing geo-political realities bound the whole atmosphere to be hugely diversified. From the time of its early thoughts down to the present day people's state of mind has undergo stable changes due to some inevitable socio-philosophical atmosphere and this cannot be denied that the changes which have been taken place in almost every stage of Indian lives must be dialectical in nature. In a broad sense the term 'Dialectical' means dialogical phenomenon that exposes the substantial debates and discussion between two diametrically opposed thoughts. The history of the Indian philosophies dates back to the early 2000bc when the Indian civilizations were new to

have their existences. Since then a number of schools of philosophy continued to emerge and thus set the progress of the Indian society on move.

If we look into the history of philosophy then we see that dialectical method comes into prominence in Hegelian approach while its origin is firmly based upon Grecian old thoughts. Plato's approach to the truth is somewhat argumentative so, he overhauls the exact meaning of justice by the process of argument and counter argument. He stresses on the process of this method in order to dismiss the misconceptions. Anyway, the word 'dialectics' is especially taken as a method of argument where two antagonistic subjects are reconciled through the process of agreement and disagreement. Hegel clearly advocates that there can never be any thought if it lacks the similarity and dissimilarity in any form. Relation, thus, is the basic impetus of idea. However, it is noted that this relation is not final anyhow and it needs to be an antagonistic relation in each case. He just concludes this process to the last stage of synthesis which he prefers to call Absolute Idea.

#### **India: Between the 1500bc to 200ad Period**

Many scholars and elites have the opinion that the Sankhya and the Yoga represent the earliest philosophic speculations of India. But systematic Indian school of philosophy is found to be built with the teaching of Gautama Buddha. And all other thoughts prevalent before the Buddhist philosophy are difficult to be sketched clearly. There were at least three currents of thought: first, the sacrificial Karma people perform to attain anything he desired by the force of the magical rites; secondly the thought of the Upanisads that teaches the idea of self or Brahman as the ultimate reality and truth and all other thing which pass away would not abide permanently; Thirdly the nihilistic conceptions that teaches that there is no law, no abiding reality, that everything happens or comes into being by a fortuitous concourse of circumstances or by some unknown fate or force. These schools of philosophy had probably come to a Deadlock because of their lack of rational basis behind them on which they could lean for support.

#### **Buddhist philosophy:**

At this juncture Buddha came and propagated a new superstructure of thought on altogether original lines which thenceforth opened up a new avenue of philosophy for all posterity to come. Three main disciples of Gautama Buddha were Upali, Ananda and Mahakashyap who learned them his teachings and passed them on to his followers. Buddha propagated simple principles of life and practical ethics that

common people could easily follow. He says that the world is a full of misery. Man needs to seek liberation from this painful world. Buddha's teachings are very practical and aim to suggest that how to attain peace of mind and ultimate liberation from this material world. Buddha told his disciples: "Two things only my disciples, do I teach misery and the cessation of misery" (Sharma, 2009, p.70). Then Buddha gives the four noble truths and realizes the nirvana from this material world. These four noble truths are:

a. ***There is suffering:*** In this path Buddha says human beings suffering from ailments, pains and deaths, and he realizes that there is definitely suffering in human life.

b. ***There is cause of suffering:*** Here Buddha believes that it is the desire that motivates the cycle of birth and death. In this path Buddha says, where birth is, there is jati. Everything in this world is conditional, relative, limited. Suffering being a fact, it must have a cause. It must depend on some conditions. Therefore, desire is the fundamental cause of suffering. 'This being that arises', 'the causes being present that effect arises', and so this path is called the pratityasamutpadavada or the law of dependent origination.

c. ***There is end of suffering:*** In which Buddha believes that cause of suffering is to remove and then people will attain the nirvana. When passions, desires and love of life are totally destroyed, and pain stopped. This Truth leads to the end of all the sorrows which are the causes of pains in human life. It causes the destruction of ego (aham or ahamkara), jealousy, doubt. And the mind gains the complete freedom from desire, pain and any kind of attachment. The mind enters into the state of complete peace, leading to nirvana.

d. ***Path of Liberation:*** The fourth Noble Truth is to give the eightfold path that takes to liberation. Buddha's philosophy searches the path of liberation through which one can attain nirvana. The above-discussed Buddhist philosophy was born at the common folk but on their way got confined to a particular section in the name of religion. Then, after the death of Buddha this religion divided into two sects such as Hinayana and Mahayana sects.

### **Jaina Philosophy:**

The word Jaina came from the word 'jin', which means conqueror. The highest being in Jaina philosophy is called the 'tirthankara', which means one who crosses the vast ocean. There are twenty four tirthankara, first was Rsavadeva and the last was Mahavira. The Jaina theory believes that there is no god but the atman or self and this

universe is not created by the god. In Jaina philosophy the concept of the Atman is all knowing, powerful, and omniscient. Jaina believes in karma, that one has to pay the penalty for one's own Karma, but God is not the arbitrator or dispenser of the fruits of Karmas. The Jaina philosophy bases its doctrine of Truth on absolute necessity of conquering base or dross. According to the practitioners, right faith, right knowledge, right conduct tempered with mercy constitute the path to nirvana. The doctrines of Jainism are best summed up in the maxim: 'Ahimsaparamodharmah'. This philosophy has been followed by people with wide range for many generations.

### **Nyaya Philosophy:**

The founder of Nyaya School was Gautama. According to this Nyaya philosophy, moksa can be attained by acquiring the complete knowledge of truth and reality. And the mind gains complete peace and happiness. The first sutra of this school is 'Nyayasutra', which is written by Gautama is the main scripture of this philosophy. The Nyaya Darshana was among the first to discuss the Science of Psychology, the Science of Logic, The Science of Spirituality. So Nyaya Darshana is also called 'TattvaVidya' means science of knowledge, or 'VadaVidya' means science of Discourse or Debate. Nyaya is also the Science of Dialectics & Logic, Science of Analysis, Reasoning and Judgement. Nyaya Darshana left contributions in all fields of science and logic. All the later Darshanas have been influenced by the Nyaya Darshana. Nyaya is the path for all knowledge of truth and reality. According to Nyaya thinkers,

The individual self can attain true knowledge of realities and, through it, the state of liberation only by the grace of God. Without God's grace neither the true knowledge of the categories of philosophy nor the highest end of liberation is attainable by any individual being of the world (Chatterjee, 2007, pp.196-197).

This Darshana also views that this Universe has been built by Ishvara's design, and Ishvara is the Creator also. This philosophy, though later on, conferred with religious identity, manage to pervade in the human life for many centuries.

### **India: Between the 200ad to 1500 Period**

This period did not witness any emergence of new school of philosophy. But there was great development of the earlier schools such as Buddhist Philosophy, Jaina Philosophy, Nyaya Philosophy which were practiced and spread with deep insight and understanding. Radhakrishnan holds that the earlier efforts to understand and interpret

the world were not strictly philosophical attempts, since they were not troubled by any scruples about competition of the human mind or the efficiency of the instrument. Then Vedanta school philosopher Sankara interprets the Upanisads and the Brahma-Sutra and talk about non duality about the ultimate reality and profound the Advaita Vedanta School. God is the only reality, not simply in the sense that there is nothing without God, but also in the sense that there is no multiplicity even within God, so god is only 'Nirguna' Brahman. Here Sankara shows that, Brahman is pure and unqualified monism. Sankara says that the world is not the real creation of god, but as an illusion appearance, called *maya*, where God created in this world.

Ramanuja also believes that God (Brahman) is the only reality, who created the world by his gracious act of will. Ramanuja says, God (Brahman) is the unconscious matter (*acit*) and the finite spirits (*cit*). Ramanuja also says, created world is a fact and the world is a real as a Brahman and believes in 'Saguna' Brahman but he reject that the world is not illusory creation of Maya.

#### **India: 1500 and to the present**

Indian modern life has changed greatly and its impact on the society is being noticed overwhelmingly. Modern Indian philosophy is made up of the combination of European life. This happens because of the long contiguity of European civilization, more especially British influence. Indian philosophy, literature, art, ethics, and morality have had a new shape because of English influence. Many creative thinkers and high profile litterateurs including philosophers were born during this time. Historians point out the impact of this culture on our Eastern thoughts. Jawaharlal Nehru fights for Indian nationalism throughout his life; nevertheless, he concedes the good impact of English influence on Indian life. He holds,

The impact of western culture on India was the impact of a dynamic society, of a 'modern' consciousness, on a static society wedded to medieval habits of thought which, however sophisticated and advanced in its own way ... (Nehru, 1946, p.291).

This can never be denied that new life of India is created following the impact of English rule. And this has been termed as the Renaissance of Indian culture. This is reflected in Indian culture, society, religion and overall ordinary mode of life. Nirad C. Chaudhuri explains this cultural intermixture. He writes,

Last of all come the cultural of the masses. The combination of Hindu and Muslim ingredients was more stable in this stratum than in the other two,

because it sprang from more organic bonds of unity. Not only were the Hindu and Muslim masses of India closely related ethnically, they were also on a level of culture which was fairly uniform and which in its essential was a folk civilization almost wholly devoid of self-consciousness. In contact of diverse cultures the absence of self-consciousness always favours assimilations and absorption. This was also the case with the common heritage of the Hindu and Muslim masses of India (Nirad, 2001, p.568).

Swami Vivekananda grounded his philosophy on the typical Indian ethos rooted in Indian core culture and traditions. His philosophy helps to make the contemporary Indian traditions more transparent with his concretized concept on creation and the creator. Because it is observed that Indian traditional philosophy believes the reality as a metaphysical concept and God as a religious concept. But Vivekananda reduced it in his thought, Abstract Monism and Theism, which means all things exist in a single reality. He is a pantheist and yet God, according to him, is personal. Vivekananda says that ultimate reality is an Absolute Brahman. He emphasizes the monistic character of reality. But according to Vivekananda, Absolute Brahman is perfect unity, and thus the distinction between whole and parts completely vanishes. This Absolute Brahman is something beyond time, space and causation, and it is also changeless. According to Vivekananda, in reality

God is neither outside nature nor inside nature, but God and nature and soul and universe are all convertible terms. You never see two things: it is your metaphorical words that have deluded you (qtd in Lal, 2005, p.6).

According to Vivekananda reading Vedanta, men are able to achieve faith in them. Vedanta and its basic qualities give us error and there is no possibility of any sin.

Vivekananda says that the Absolute can be defined as Sat-Cit-Ananda. The concepts of Sat, which means existence and Cit, which means consciousness, but the concept Ananda which means bliss has been greatly improved by Vivekananda. Vivekananda explains that Ananda is 'love', the essential core of 'bliss'. Vivekananda claims that the Absolute and the Impersonal Brahman are the creator, ruler, and the destroyer of this world and complete cause of this world. He says,

It is not that this world was created the other day, not that a God came and created the world and since that time has been sleeping, for that cannot be. The creative energy is still going on. God is eternally creating. He is never at rest (qtd in Lal, 2005, pp.16-17).

Vivekananda's doctrine of creation has to relate to the Sankara's doctrine of Maya. Vivekananda says that Maya is the creator of this world; he also thinks that Maya is the theory of change, a Shakti that helps creation possible.

Vivekananda's concept of the nature of this fact becomes clearer when he says.

..... Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world: it is simply a statement of facts as they exists, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through his tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice-versa (qtd in Lal, 2005, pp.17-18).

Indian society witnesses freshness with the thought of Rabindranath Tagore. He expresses his thought for the common people and attempts to fulfil the spiritual urge of the people with his myth of love and affections. Rabindranath Tagore is not prepared to accept the Divine Personality as a finite one. Personality turns to be a limitation if it is a finite personality, which can be taken as a personality full of wants and defects. But the Divine Personality is 'infinite' personality which is not subject to finitude and limitations. Tagore says, "Reality is the expression of personality, like a poem, like a work of art" (qtd in Lal, 2005, p.52). Rabindranath finds a different type of evidence for creator's existence in the fact of joy inherent in every aspect of creation. Every individual has within him the capacity to feel this joy. Here too God is taken as the source of love, hope and aspirations. Tagore feels that human being is always in need of the satisfaction of some supreme being. These urges can only be met with the presence of a supreme being. Nobody can deny that man, at times, especially on some crucial moments of his life, feels a dire need of some super-human solace and hope and strength.

Tagore views that creation is the 'Lila' of the creator. He creates the fullness of joy just to avail himself in the play of joy. In Personality he says,

It is the almost a truism to say that the world is what we perceive it to be. We imagine that our mind is a mirror that is a more or less accurately reflecting what is happening outside us (qtd in Lal, 2005, pp.58-59).

Tagore says again, "When you deprive truth of its appearance it loses the best part of reality" (qtd in Lal, 2005, p.59). Tagore is often described as primarily a philosopher of humanity because in his philosophy men have been given a very key status. He is a

creature of this world. There are at least two important factors regarding the nature of man, firstly, man continues to have that combination of biological and physical nature which he has received from evolution, and secondly, he has within him a spiritual nature which makes him unique and gives him some amount of freedom. Tagore says that although body has a reality of its own, that it is the lower aspect of man's nature which needs to be transcended in order to attain the higher nature that of the soul.

Gandhi is that man who loves to sacrifice his whole life for the Indian society and so he is known as the 'Father of the Nation' or 'Bapu'. His ideas are not theoretical doctrines but a lightening path that eliminates the darkness from the way of the Indian society and culture. Gandhi believes to have faith in one god and he says that 'I am a sanatan Hindu'. Gandhi's childhood life is spent in the Vaisnavas culture because of the family atmosphere in which he grew up. He views that God is necessary not only for the satisfaction of reason or knowledgeable interest, but also for acquiring peace and comfort, strength and determination in mind as well as body. He says, ".....He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God, must rule the heart and transform it" (qtd in Lal, 2005, p.94).

Throughout his whole life, Gandhi practices Ahimsa or Non-Violence which he believes as harmless to self and others in all conditions. It means abstention from violence based on moral religious or spiritual principles. Non-Violence in connect to the Satyagraha. Gandhi's Satyagraha is based on the Vedantic ideal of self-realization. He says that "God is Truth and Truth is God". Gandhi says a true *Satyagrahi* is one who must practice truth in his action, thought, and speech. Truth and Non-Violence with love is the essential key for a true *Satyagrahi*.

Krishnachandra Bhattacharya does not claim origin of any philosophy. But the little contribution he made to the path of Indian society was not explored justifiably. His concept of theoretical consciousness is a new to emerge in the Indian philosophy. Judgment of science claim to have a relation with facts. Both Science and Philosophy are expressions of Theoretic Consciousness, because both have to deal with judgments that are speakable or at least systematically communicable. K.C. Bhattacharya defines "Theoretic Consciousness, at its minimum, is the understanding of a speakable" (qtd in Lal, 2005, p.225). Krishnachandra says that Theoretic Consciousness involves not the knowing, but the understanding of speakable. It understands, it is aware, but it does not explicitly know. According to K.C. Bhattacharya, Self- subsistent is the theoretical inadequacy of its approach to the

object. It is the irrationality of our beliefs in the ultimate truths of matters of fact that leads to the more rational belief in the pure object, or the self-subsistent.

Radhakrishnan never intends his thoughts to be confined to any particular religious identity. His philosophy was to discover the universe and its people. Radhakrishnan thinks that the main function of a philosophical enquiry is to find an explanation of the universe. He thinks that the ultimate reality must satisfy all questions regarding the how and why of the universe. He is in the view that man, as we find him in the world is an individual with biological and psychological identity, and this individual entity is shaped and determined by his characters, ambitions and motives. He is also aware that man has in him a peculiar combination of egoism and self-transcendence, of selfishness and universal love. And in terms of these combinations he develops his views regarding the nature of the soul in this world. Radhakrishnan views, that when we cannot access something in the normal ways, through the ways of reason or intellect we describe it as mystical. Mysticism becomes a defect of thought when we approach it with negative intention. This shows ignorance and the lack of capacity to explain something. Mysticism, in fact, is a natural and necessary aspect of higher thinking.

Iqbal views that the ultimate reality of the universe is God (Allah) and his creation of this world is not known by the ordinary way. According to Iqbal, intuition has a major role in mankind, and this intuition help to shape the life and behaviour of the human and it creates enduring impressions on the mind of man. He advocates the religion and believes in one God and reality. Iqbal believes that the individuality is a matter of degrees. Therefore, Iqbal conceives that God is the Supreme Ego, as the ideal of ego-hood.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, religion is the integral part of Indian society and culture and philosophy. It cannot be separated, nor can it exist as a separate identity. So the Indian philosophy, though in the name of religious institution, should be exercised for the betterment of the society and its people. The thinkers and philosophers came up with their thoughts and ideas to refine and enrich the Indian society not to expand the arena of the religion he/she belonged to. By birth he happens to be a disciple of some religion, but in thought, he never remains confined to any particular arena of religion. The early Indian philosophers such as Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Shri Chaitanya, came to build the society and to give the people a right path for their life and later their

thoughts as we have discussed, turned into a school of religion. Even modern thinkers are also kept confined by religious boundaries. These boundaries are to be left so that their thoughts are remained open for all.

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