



Search for the Ultimate Reality: Select Philosophical Outlooks

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ABSTRACT

Human nature has many accredited psychological dimensions. At times, there is a visible admixture which gets displayed creating a sort of confusion even for the researchers. In general, nature means “essential characteristics” which can delineate the true essence present in a succinct form. Ages have rolled down and yet human nature could not be easily bracketed into a clear format or zone with ultimate description. It has definitely remained enigmatic although there are noteworthy attempts to understand the same in psychology in particular. From the philosophical point of view, we commonly come across in all cultures an objective standpoint. Even from ancient time there was always an open curiosity to know and further infer the reality from the world around. The objective approach seems to be quite systematic and does include a scientific method. It comprises of Observation, Appreciation and Analysis of the things belonging to the natural world. Of course, as a further recourse to it we have later on the introduction of subjective approach also. Having dealt with the external world, it was turning inwards out of curiosity as well as a sort of psychological insecurity. Thinking about life and its end viz; Death, puzzled everyone. Owing to this the inquisitive mind which preferred turning towards the subjective mode, demanded a meditative stance to explore the variety realms of inner consciousness. As a result, those involved in this project aimed at the possible principle of unity operating over plurality of psychic life.

Both eastern and western philosophers even from the pre-Socratic period found something very curious about Nature’s functioning. Therefore, different methods were employed to research out. In brief, we can say that the overall efforts were directed to the method of synthesizing everything. In this regard we have references to the holistic approach and also

integral approach. This paper attempts to work on the select philosophical approaches which always strived to get close to the main aim of releasing the burden from the human mind with regard to the Ultimate Reality. The paper tries to cover the vast subject meagerly and therefore has no pretensions to its completeness.

KEYWORDS: Human Nature, Objective Approach, Subjective Approach and Various Viewpoints.

I. INTRODUCTION

There had been continual efforts to know human nature, rather the essential characteristics from various aspects. However, but for the psychological and philosophical insights, majority approaches could not come to even a minimal level of expectations or desired results. In the animal world and plant kingdom too, it was rather relatively easy because they are not granted certain faculties as human beings have. Sometimes on perusal we realize that nothing comes out in a totally blessed form. In this regard, one can take into consideration the scientific physical laws like no motion are free from the opposing force or is friction free unless it is a deliberately created vacuum as a free medium, irrespective of howsoever potent the driving force is. One of the major flaws in our analysis is not accepting or rather disregarding the proven scientific facts and rejoicing much the idealized human personality which hardly exists. A fact to be sportively admitted is that as a whole human personality with all its attributes is pretty weak and this unfortunately is vociferously denied. It could have been an easy exercise to train the mind and subsequently erect the human personality if the spadework was honestly done at the preliminary stage itself. There is no point in blaming one particular agency for this colossal damage but



outrightly we have to accept that the excesses oozed out from the unchecked religious sentiments from the adherents. We have scores of examples to quote from the history which are on record to show the irreparable damage caused by the man-made religions. There was a heavy reliance on the ritualistic practices for personal gains.

“The Mundaka(Upanishad) says that these sacrifices are like weak rafts (i.e., they are unable to take one across the sea of worldly misery) and those fools that take these as the superior means, suffer again the pangs of old age and death... A deeper significance is attached to sacrifice, when the worshipping self and the gods worshipped are realized to be the same. The ceremonies of offering oblations to gods thus come to be looked upon as mere external affairs fit for the ignorant who do not understand the mystery of the Universe.¹

There is always an allowance for the psychological need of a belief system but that should be within limits. At times it could even be a practical necessity. William James remarked that even the belief in the existence of God should be looked upon as a priority based practical requisition. Philosophical studies have gone with the investigations made by sciences to understand the implications and further we find the same is being stretched for grasping the general nature of Universe which comprises of Human Nature and God. Although it goes without dispute that problems of philosophy in the East and West are same, the methods adopted to wrestle with them tactfully are different. In India Religion and Philosophy do not exist independently. Therefore, Philosophy was never totally looked upon as an exclusive source of knowledge. The chief aim was to appease the curiosity to know life after death. This obviously made Indian Philosophy to stretch beyond the logical thinking and subsequently reasoning. The sensitive mind and its demands were given utmost importance. Naturally the Indian approach could not be fitted into the normal subjective boundaries. At the outset, it sportively accepted the presence of evils in life. Right from physical, moral, ethical and even to a large extent through religious practices. Initially Indian philosophers were always concerned about it but later almost got obsessed with it. That is why there was a practical necessity to eliminate the evil, which is a hindrance. It is with this outlook that so much emphasis was placed on Renunciation by all the recognized schools of thought whether sticking to the established set of beliefs or belonging to the heretical ones. Therefore, one may find the overall tone of Indian Philosophy crossing the boundaries of even Ethics.

II. HINDUISTIC STANDPOINT

Knowing the Ultimate Reality is almost a Universal desire common to all cultures irrespective of the religion followed. It is indeed worth knowing because with whatever portion of it is known may help to decide one's course of life. There are various names by which the Ultimate Reality is referred to. Generally, it is taken synonymous to the Absolute. From the philosophical point of view, it remains as a motivational point or mark in the path of spirituality. In India it was the firm base of every religious activity for exploring an objective standpoint with regard to the Ultimate. Owing to this, hunting for realizing the beauty in Nature and sublimity around, always remained the main aim. It was the world around wherein the sages tirelessly explored to find out the reflections of the Ultimate rather in an intuitive as well as scientific way. This was because the stages which they adopted as a scheme in their research involved Observation, Appreciation and lastly Inferring through analysis. Their main desire was to discover the ultimate unifying principle. This we can easily trace during the Upanishadic period. Plurality in the world was an open fact revealed by Nature without any reservation, but the underlying principle remained in the concealed manner, which was referred to “Brahman”. This furthermore was extended to the psychic aspect of human nature with the mind-body relationship as another requisition. This was designated as “Atman”, the self.

When two objects are identical, logically they might apparently indicate similarities in manifolds. Yet there is bound to be an existential difference. Therefore, the term non-dual need not be equated to the word identical. In fact, technically the word ‘identical’ is clear because it does not claim sameness cent percent. With this supposition Indian philosophers speak of ‘Advaita’, connoting same and not two different entities. In order to avoid the language limitations Indian Philosophy mostly speaks about the non-dualistic approach in Advaita, rather than emphasizing on monotheism or even for that matter monism. In other words, the Hindu point of view considers everything as a manifestation of the Supreme being and obviously that is the only Ultimate Reality. Once this concept is accepted there would be a clear vision of the world around us. However, it is not quite easy to grasp at once all the shades of the Ultimate Reality. One needs to discipline self with complete control on personal emotions. The commonly found impulsive nature in human beings could be a great hurdle. To know the Brahman, right study combined with discipline in thought and disposition must go hand in hand. In



brief this viewpoint passes through stages with a scientific temper. Recognition of matter and then transcending over it to realize that it is all energy based is the most scientific and a proper leap. However, while understanding the source of this energy, one has to point out towards the Ultimate Reality only. This could be the genuine reason as to why in every culture there is so much reverence to the idealistic philosophy with its emphasis on the Ultimate Reality or the Cosmic Mind. What are its features? Well, the Ultimate Reality rejoices in Sat-Chit-Ananda i.e., Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. It is an epithet for an experience of the Brahman.

'Atman or Brahman is the only reality... Reality, says Sureshvara, is one and so diversity cannot be Ultimate. The unqualified non-dual absolute which transcends human thought is described in innumerable inadequate ways by different people just as in the famous parable, 'Blind Men and the Elephant', the same elephant was described in various inadequate ways by the blind men. Everything else may change, everything else may be destroyed, everything else may be momentary except the Self because the very conceptions of change, destruction and momentariness presuppose it.'²

III. MADHYAMIKA

This approach was initiated by Nagarjuna who was born in South India in 2nd century AD. Mostly this is translated as void or emptiness and taken as Sunyavada. That is why although this is considered through Madhyamika, yet there are other interpretations credited to Buddhism with multiple meanings. To begin with it presumes that the universe is totally devoid of any reality as such. There is a sort of intrinsic relationship when it comes to the study of subject, object and the knowledge thereof. That is why the Reality does depend on all these. In case we find one of these as false or faulty to a certain extent, then the very concept of Reality collapses and deserves to be dismissed. Technically it is viewed as the Knower, Known and the Knowledge. In the Western approach it is looked upon as a Nihilistic attitude. In Nihilism the basic presumption is that life itself is meaningless. Therefore, it is obvious that there is an utter disregard to all religious and moral principles. In continuation it insists that nothing in the world has a real existence. This outlook can be seen in the 19th century as a revolutionary doctrine in Russia where there was an urge to disregard and wantonly disapprove the established social order.

Madhyamika as the name itself suggests is trying to seek a mean path, avoiding the extreme

viewpoints. Therefore, it does not dismiss reality but clearly the phenomenal world. There is a presumption that behind such a world there is bound to be the Reality. Since the phenomenal part is totally rejected it is called Sunya or the doctrine is referred to Sunyavada. There is a sceptic view that it is improbable to grasp the real nature of objects through intellect. With an extension of the same the description given also cannot be free from faults. The logical claim here is that the one which we think is real has to be totally independent and therefore does not depend on any other entity for its existence. This was termed by Nagarjuna as 'Sunya'. One may get the impression that Nagarjuna avoided reality and unreality, both in their extreme forms. In other words, it is a philosophy concerned with noumenon which could be considered as a transcendental reality. This may also be imagined as the one behind the phenomenal world. It is also believed that it is not subjected to any condition or alteration.

IV. STOICISM AND BUDDHISM

These two philosophies were created independently but there are remarkable similarities. The older one of them i.e., Buddhism was founded around 500 BC. Both of them deal with the absolute Reality with common man's experience and his level of comprehension, than unnecessarily shooting with imagination. At times when the human imagination is overstretched it automatically gathers the moss of the falsifying ideas. Both these philosophies have emphasized more on looking inwards to realize the genuine source of happiness. Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, discovered in his youthful age that suffering is the ultimate Truth and a Reality experienced by one and all. Some may have the courage to accept it while others may efficiently hide the fact with false pretensions. The root cause of it is the desires that we nurture without proper analysis. This human habit of chasing the desires or clinging to the same, will finally lead to an utter disappointment only. Therefore, the solution suggested for this is to strive for 'Nirvana' wherein one becomes desireless and that is the only Ultimate Reality. Of course, Buddha suggested the methods for reaching that stage and it is popularly known as the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the righteous path which can guide the aspirant to reach that state. So, there is acceptance of the existing reality and then a pathway to escape from the harsh realities so that one becomes self-awakened.

Stoicism on the other hand expects its followers to sportively accept the existing reality or pattern of life than unnecessarily romanticizing



one's own flighty ideas, generally trusting or relying on the religious sentiments and wishful thinking. Adapting self to the dictates of the mighty Nature is indeed the foremost and wise step. There is no sense in defying the course of Nature that has its own discipline. An unconditional surrender would be a sign of practical wisdom leading to freedom. The burden of the past which cannot be corrected or redeemed and expectations of the unseen future bring in nothing else than an untold misery. One has to pay a very heavy price for such attempts. A virtuous life is the only solution to end human tragedy rising owing to the baggage of wrong emotions or the destructive emotions being entertained. Ultimate Reality can be experienced by becoming absolutely indifferent to both extremes like Pleasure and Pain, or Happiness and Unhappiness. Both Buddhism and Stoicism hold on to end the human tragedy resulting out of ignorance of the cyclic working of Nature. The main difference however, in these two approaches is that Stoicism accommodates God or Divine, whereas Buddhism outrightly rejects the same. Another point where both differ is with regard to the theory of reincarnation. Stoics disagree with this concept but Buddhists do trust in rebirth based on the merits of the acts performed by us. 'In Buddhism, by contrast, there are many criteria for mental and social well-being as well as a set of practices for achieving it. When it comes not just to understanding mental afflictions and how to grapple with those but also how to move into exceptional states of mental health, Buddhism has an enormous amount to offer (to the West).'³

If we look into the modern outlook from East, then in brief a passing reference to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy becomes essential. According to him the Ultimate Reality could be experienced through Yoga. There is much emphasis on the single word "Sachchidananda" although it is the result of the confluence of three distinct words Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It is not an easy work to grasp the Ultimate Reality merely by the application of human Intellect, yet a prescribed path is available. In addition to these three, two more terms cum concepts are strongly recommended to be included. They are The Infinite Nature and Eternity. While cognizing the Universe these additional concepts need to be taken into consideration for experiencing the potency of the Ultimate Reality and subsequently realizing the same. Once the realization takes place it steadily generates the experience of the Immortality which is in fact its major shade. Most of the saints from ancient times were engaged in the study of this enigmatic nature

of the Ultimate Reality. For common human beings it is the psychological factor which holds on to the finitude only and transcending over the same becomes an uphill task. But once the Consciousness is granted a free passage or driver's seat it becomes an objective study so that eternity and infinity, both become easy to understand. In 'Life Divine' Sri Aurobindo has made it very clear by clarifying the very purpose of life and the way we need to be focused upon. "Lastly, to be fully is to have the full delight of being. Being without delight of being, without an entire delight of itself and all things is something neutral or diminished; it is existence, but it is not fullness of being. This delight too must be intrinsic, self-existent, automatic; it cannot be dependent on things outside itself, has the joy of it as part of its universality. All undelight, all pain and suffering are a sign of imperfection, of incompleteness; they arise from a division of being, an incompleteness of consciousness of being, an incompleteness of the force of being. To become complete in being, in consciousness of being, in front of being, in delight of being and to live in this integrated completeness is the divine living."⁴

V. CONCLUSION

Humanity as a whole is engaged in pursuing the aim to know the Ultimate Reality with its true nature and functioning. In fact, this is going on from centuries. It is sad that many intellects have hurriedly concluded the results just to claim as the first one to announce the success of their exploration. In this fact they have heavily relied on the religions and ardently supported them with great reverence considering it as the revealed knowledge. There is nothing wrong in referring to the religious scriptures or available textual matter and seeking guidance. However, when any research work is carried out it requires a detailed literature survey so as to know the mistakes committed in past. Placing the statements before the world with emotive expressions cannot be taken as the ultimate knowledge. Covering all the aspects is ever a basic necessity. But then there is also a trend much in vogue to disallow scientific inquiry, arguing that the metaphysical subjects do not fall under the purview of science. This is really a damaging approach and a practice going on unchecked. With the progress of scientific temperament, it would be wise to prune the knowledge accumulated step by step in the interest of humanity. There is absolutely no sense in overtaking the scientific methods enthusiastically and blindly, promoting own baseless ideas as spiritual guidance. It is better to be a sincere atheist than falling prey to the uncontrolled emotions or



rather hallucinations, thinking that an entry into the spiritual zone is very easy.

Therefore, one has to begin with the Theory of human Nature so as to know what are we and then handle the Theory of the Self to gain the knowledge of who are we. Further in the chronological order efforts are needed to be directed towards how we should live – a question falling under the Normative implications for the very human existence. It must always be borne in the mind that fundamentally we are social creatures supposed to be rational and cultured too. Success in life would turn out to be the result of choosing good over evil and therefore a moral platform is the basic requisite. To rise over the sufferings, which are inevitable, the God or the Ultimate Reality's signs must be read carefully or correctly. Success comes only when we choose to escape the Karmic(deeds) cycle of reincarnation. Quelling the worldly desires through any of the various methods that are recommended, especially Meditation can surely lead us to Self- realization. In brief the Ultimate Reality is expressed through Nirvana which needs no explanation as it stands not just as a human goal but a superhuman goal.

Finally, we have to understand the spirit behind the philosophical survey and exploration for trying to know the Ultimate Reality. Life on this planet must go on with the commands of the nature laws but at the same time on the mental plane there has to be a clarity of thought. 'Liberation is not the soul's becoming identical with God. The liberated soul having pure consciousness, untainted by any imperfection, becomes, in this respect, similar to God (Brahmaprakara). This similarity of nature is what is meant by the Upanishads which say that the liberated soul attains unity with God.'⁵

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