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THE CONCEPT OF PLEASURE: VEDANTA AND BUDDHISM

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Introduction

Several traditions of philosophical thought originated in India and consists of various schools. These include the six orthodox (astika) schools (darshanas) of Hinduism, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vedanta, and the heterodox schools (nastika) which include Buddhism, Jainism, and the materialistic carvaka school. Indian Philosophy relates to many practices of day's life, is idealistic, and gives an introspective approach to reality with the knowledge of atmavidya. Man is spiritual in nature. Religion makes one broad minded, loving, divine and charitable, and philosophy is the rationale behind religion. Indian schools generally embody the doctrines of Karma and rebirth. Philosophy and religion are inseparables. The earliest documents to be studied are the veda-samhitas and their culmination as the Upanishads which signify the magnificent heritage of the Indian people. Indian philosophy has been intensely spiritual, concerned with the spiritual destiny of man. Carvac school believes in the material welfare and sees only the external physical world. Indian philosophy takes an introspective approach to finding the truth with the emphasis on inner life and not dependence on the physical world. Truth has existed eternally and is not the possession of few. Living a "good life", fulfilling all responsibilities and not getting unduly tied up in actions with emotions; unflinching faith leads to the search for truth. Even though different schools exist and differ in proclamations, all the same there was consideration given for the view points of others and this stemmed from the basic fact that they kept an open mind and exhibited a willingness to listen to others – the intent is not to go into the details of the periods of Indian Philosophy, and suffice it would be to add that the vedic period, epic period, sutra period and scholastic periods belonged to the eras to 1500 BCE to 600 BCE, 600 BCE – 200 CE, after 200 CE and to 17th century CE respectively.

Philosophy of Life and Humanity

The study of man as an individual and the knowledge that becomes necessary to locate the highest principle of existence; the finding out the 'Atman', all this leads to applying the rationale behind the branches of knowledge. Truth has three degrees of manifestation – the absolute, the empirical and the apparent. Growth and evolution and above all, a kind of self competency which asserts itself in every living body are specialties by themselves. Human conduct has to be maintained with cooperation of the society and external pressures are likely to create non observance of moral rules. The discovery of the ultimate meaning and essence of existence is the central purpose of philosophy. Philosophy is the expression of the inner urge to know the Atman. Feeling the depths of one's heart is essential. Philosophy has no partialities, no prejudices, no likes, no dislikes. Life without philosophy is unimaginable. Man is curious to know the truth behind the wonders of the world, and he speculates, argues, discusses. Descartes dowering everything, Kant's critical method of enquiry and Bradley's skeptical study, all these are relevant. K.Satchidananda Murty in his book 'The Indian Spirit', says 'Another peculiar trait of Hindu Philosophy is its sense of human dignity. Man in Indian thought is, no doubt, a speck in the infinite universe, but his is a divine destiny and majesty.

Let us turn our attention to Vedanta which literally means culmination of knowledge, and providing insight into your real being to gains inner peace and bliss. Vedanta also educates on the techniques of right living, in brief Vedanta satisfies one's spiritual and material requirements. Vedanta is a systematic and formulated knowledge of life and living. It helps, in providing knowledge of one's intrinsic self. The art is to analyze, investigate and realize the essence of life. K.Satchidananda Murty says 'the dignity given to human existence by the Vedanta thought and by the thought of the classical ages of Indian culture exceeded anything conceived by the western idea of humanity'.

Ethics and Religion

The assertion is that religion is necessary to live ethically since religion forms a positive code. Hinduism is the predominant and indigenous religion of the Indian subcontinent. The idea of 'Dharma' and its prurience in upholding everything in balance is of significance. Dharma regulates moral principles. Ethics in Buddhism is traditionally based on the enlightened perspective of the Buddha. The foundation of Buddhist ethics for lay people is the Panca sila: no killing, stealing lying, sexual misconduct, or intoxicants. H.S. Prasad says that Buddhism can be appropriately called, an 'ethicized religion' or 'religion of ethics and soteniology. He continues to add that the Buddha's principles of ethics primarily focus on the psychological transformation of human mind to achieve moral perfection. The objective is to make thi9s – worldly life peaceful happy, and serves the aspirant's purpose without



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meditation etc. The Buddha's Noble eight-fold path is distinct in accommodating these aims. Christian ethics stresses the need for love, forgiveness, and the principles are based on the teachings within the Bible. Confucian ethics emphasizes on relationships, in other words to be, ethical is to do what one's relationships require. The important point is that man for his happiness has to adhere to certain religious and ethical guidelines. It is striking to note what K.Satchidananda Murty says "Another point for reflection is that ascetic or puritan virtues have an economic value and are also useful for success in life, especially in commerce and trade in a civil society regulated by law. "Sangharaksluta says their doctrinal differences notwithstanding, the schools of Buddhism are unanimous that Dharma-dana, the gift of the doctrine, is the highest form of giving. It is this fact which makes Buddhism a missionary religion in the true sense of the term. Aurobindo says." But the weakness of the kinetic and the emotional religious is that they are too much absorbed in some divine personality and the divine values of the finite.

Vedanta

With the knowledge of Vedanta one gains inner peace and bliss. The technique of right living is learnt from the concepts of Vedanta which is a systematic and formulated knowledge. Vedanta helps a person to analyse, investigate and realize the essence of life. In the name of religion fanatic superstitions and parasitic ideas have infested entire mankind. Developing the thinking and reasoning faculties is a natural process and Vedanta helps to evolve and the aim is to attain peace and happiness. The tendency of the mind is to wander, and moves around the past or future but seldom in the present. Vedanta provides ways and means to control the mind, and conserves energy for useful and efficient works. Practical living and positive approach to life is a need. Stresses, strains, anxiety and working can be avoided and Vedanta provides the requisite knowledge. This lasting happiness lies in your own self and knowledge enables one to discover the source. Human intellect cannot conceive infinity. When mind is purified and subjected to meditation, and in this silence the infinite can be realized. Vedanta tells us that a self – centred man focuses all his interest and attention upon himself. All his actions and perceptions, emotions and thoughts are directed only to the welfare of his individual person. Vedanta gives real inner spiritual strength and helps remove ignorance and take individual towards wisdom. K.Satchidananda Murty says "perfect knowledge no doubt is produced by hearing the great Vedanta texts, if it is at all produced; but it is not always produced in all as soon as they hear. He continues to add "to surrender ourselves entirely to god is we ought to do, but to become aware of him, scriptural study and meditation – so, use of reason – are necessary". Ananda Mishra in his paper "murty's critique of Advaita", says Murty has been very much influenced by Vedantic issue and finds Advaitic conception of Nirguna Brahman untenable. He attacks the doctrine of maya very much in the fashion of Vishitadvaitins – K.S.Murty says "But as long as man is in this world – in whatever way he may have come into it – he has many alternative ways of doing things or not doing, and so he is responsible for them. What he does matters to himself and to the world, for he is a real being. But he is not, ofcourse, entirely the maker of his own destiny. God has to be reckoned with. Hari Shankar Prasad says" for Advaita Vedanta the only fundamental substantial reality is Brahman, others are derivatives, and thus illusory. He continues to add 'some like Advaita Vedantins emphasized the intensive knowledge of Brahman and the transcendence of Karma for the final liberation!

Buddhism

S. Radhakrishnan writes 'Buddha like Lucretions, felt that the world would be better for the triumph of natural law over super naturalism. By announcing a religion which proclaimed that each man could gain salvation for himself without the meditation of priests or reference to gods, he would increase the respect for human nature and raise the tone of morality. It is a foolish idea to suppose that another can cause us hapiness or nuisery'.

Buddha wished to build ethics on facts, not on metaphysics. Buddha put an end to superstition and established a religion centered on pure reason. The Buddha taught man that the greatest of conquests was not the subjugation of others but of the self. According to the Buddha, one must first seek to understand one's own mind. Buddha having understood, the limitations of the human intellect taught that enlightenment cannot be achieved by this means. Enlightenment vanquishes ignorance. G. Sundara Ramaiah in his paper K.Satchidananda Murty's interpretation of indian philosophy, says 'coruing to Buddhism, Murty says that the Buddhists are observed by the nevation of self. They have claimed that in the world there is no teacher other than the Buddha who deries the self, because he maintained 'Nairatmya Vada' as the central doctrine. Murty says 'It the self denied by them the true-self or just the lower empirical self. Buddha carried an opinion that man's ignorance leading to behind beliefs, caused the suffering. Self effort for purtiy of mind towardsx awakened wisdom with peace and happiness. The human life reveals facts of life called the Four Noble truths. It goes like this. Human life is full of dukkha, there is cause for this dukkha samudaya it has remedy dukkha nirodha, and that the Noble eight-fold path (dukkha nirodha-ganini-patipada – magga) leads to liberation. the middle path shown by Buddha consists of intellectual, contemplative and moral virtues. Awakening is a prodcut of logical rationality. To quote Aurobindo "It does not cover its spirtual sense, and if this outward utility were all, we should have to exclude Buddha and christ whose mission was not at all to



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destroy evil doers and deliver the good, but to bring to all men a new spiritual message and a new law of divine growth and spiritual realisation.

Vedanta and Buddhism, Viewing together

The Indian Philosophical thought carries these, sharing many basic ideas such as believing in the Karma, that there is sorrow, knowledge through renunciation and meditation. Vedanta and Buddhism lived side by side for a long time influencing each other. Helmuth Von glasenapp says” the strong predilection of the Indian mind for a doctrine of universal unity (ruonism) has led the representatives of Mahayana to conceive samsara and Nirvana as two aspects of the same and single true reality; for Nagarjuna the empirical world is their appearance, as all Dharmas manifest in it, are perishable and conditioned by other Dharmas, without having any independent existence of their our. Only the indefinable ‘voidness’ (sunyata) to be grasped in meditation and realised in Nirvana, has true reality. Vedanta sees deliverance as the manifestation of a state which, though obscured, has been existing from time immemorial; for the Buddhist however, Nirvana is a reality which differs entirely from all Dharmas as manifested in Samsara, and which only becomes effective, if they are abolished.

Summing up

K. Satchidananda Murty writes “Man’s creative spirit alters material conditions in every age, these give rise to new ideas and institutions, which in turn alter material conditions, because of which again ideas and institutions change! Constant effort must be exercised to hold on to virtues and morals and one has to choose the right mode of living in accordance with the dictates of Vedanta and Buddhism, to create happiness of oneself and the other. Any finite or earthly possession and enjoyment by nature are devoid of this happiness. Fullness of self brings in hope, energy, wisdom enabling one to contemplate for higher values. Buddhist ethics also aims at happiness for ultimate freedom. A. Parthasarathy says “Inclusive love and not exclusive attachment is the unfolding of heaven. Desire is the root of emotion. Vedanta is like physical exercise. You do not see any immediate benefit. It provides you the inner growth and development to relish and rule the world. Sound physical and mental health, beauty, speech, love, food, friendship, fearlessness, happiness, peace, freedom harmony, wealth, and offspring are basic goals of the vedic man. A good life consists in them. Hari Shankar Prasad adds that fullness of consciousness, fullness of value, and fullness of ethical conduct are interrelated.

The important point to remember is that a regulated and disciplined life is required and the guidance of scriptures and writings of eminent Philosophers, irrespective of the ideologies they carry, is imperative. The philosophical approach is a must and one should strictly adhere to the moral values in order to achieve happiness.

Whether it is Vedanta or Buddhism, both these have sufficient ingredients for one to pick, understand and practice to lead a happy life. Helmuth Von glasenapp says “To sum up; the vedantin wishes to penetrate to the last reality which dwells within him as an immortal essence, or seed, out of which everything has arisen. The follower of Pali Buddhism, however, hopes by complete abandoning of all corporeality, all sensations, all perceptions, all volitions, and acts of consciousness, to realise a state of bliss which is entirely different from all that exists in the samsara.

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