

UNIT-III

Self in Indian thought

Structure

- **Self in Indian perspective**
- **Contribution of Indian thought to the understanding of self.**

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Introduction:

India has a long, rich, vibrant and assorted tradition of philosophy. Yet when we study “philosophy” only western philosophy and philosophers has gained formal acknowledgement around the world. This may be due to reason that religion and philosophical thought always have had close links in India. They are of metaphysical nature, which is less accepted in west. In India, philosophical ideas, are an always attempt to understand the nature of everyday living. Philosophy is never seen simply as an intellectual pursuit or separated from the reality of day to day life, but a practice to enhance the overall living experience of humans on earth.

Indian Philosophy (in Sanskrit known as ‘Darshanas’), refers to several traditions of philosophical schools originated from Indian subcontinent, including Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and Jain philosophy. These define the various classical systems or darśana, ranging from realist to idealist, dualist to monist, theist to atheist, and so on. Indian thinkers consider it to be a realistic practice, and the goal of which should always be improvement of communities’ lives not just one person. The concept of self

has been studied from multiple perspectives in India. A review of the study of self in India reveals that indeed the core of Indian self is metaphysical, and it has been the focus of study by philosophers as well as psychologists. There is general agreement that the metaphysical self, Atman, is the real self. This metaphysical self is embodied in a biological self, and through the caste system right at birth, the biological self acquires a social self.

Contribution of Indian thought to the understanding of self

- **Self in Vedas and Upanishads**

Modern Psychology suffers from gaps which are fulfilled by native Psychology from any culture. We have vast array of psychological resources in front of us yet we feel distant from it because their roots are not associated with us. Modern psychology reflects a view of the self that is based upon the physical body and outer social interactions. It seeks happiness at a physical level in the material world. Its view of the mind is limited to the brain and our biological compulsions, starting with sexuality. When it asks us to develop ourselves it is a seeking of outer power and prestige, not inner awareness. Its idea of self reflects external factors only, not any consciousness that endures beyond death.

Here, let us remember the profound teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads. Our true Self, called Atman or Purusha, consists of the boundless light of consciousness. It has no birth or death, no pleasure or pain, no past or future. It has no qualities as defined by the five elements. Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot make it wet. It does not perish along with the body. It does not change along with the fluctuations of the mind. It is permanent, immutable and beyond sorrow. Abiding in it is ultimate peace, bliss and fulfillment. Yet, we find that modern psychology doesn't recognize such a higher self, much less teach us how to connect to it.

Our inner identity cannot be reduced to a name, job, title or circumstance. No one and nothing can own, define, limit, or control the deeper reality within us. We are not simply a physical organism or a complex set of chemical reactions in the brain, but the inner consciousness through which these operate and which transcends their fluctuations. We contain the

potentials and formations of all existence, extending beyond time and space to the infinite and eternal.

- **The importance of Vedanta**

Vedantic philosophy contains a profound psychology of Self-realization, not merely a psychology of physical or social identity. Vedanta teaches that you are the entire universe. You are not limited to the body. You have many bodies in many incarnations in different worlds or lokas. Your nature is cosmic.

Similarly, you need not seek happiness or fulfillment outside your true Self. On the contrary, your inner self is full of light and your role in the world should be to bring light, compassion and wisdom to all. Everything you see in the world of nature represents some portion of your true Self, some aspect of your cosmic identity. All creatures are different expressions of your deeper Self that pervades the entire existence.

Only such a deeper vision of self can bring us true happiness. Otherwise, we remain trapped in outer ego identities, in how we appear or what we do, rather than who we truly are. This means that the best practices for psychological wellbeing are mantra and meditation based upon an inner search for our true nature in consciousness. The mind easily falls into dependence, compulsion or addiction if we do not have an enduring connection with our inner being.

If you aspire to enduring mental peace and emotional wellbeing start by taking a course in Vedanta and learn how the human being and the universe, the Divine and our inner essence are one. Step out of the isolation of the ego and mere outer social definitions to your ultimate identity as the Self of all. Open your awareness to infinite space.

Naturally, this greater Self-realization cannot be accomplished quickly and requires a lifelong sadhana (meditation), but if we sincerely pursue it we can progress every day in consciousness and deathless awareness, not merely in outer achievements and acquisitions.

The sages of India have preserved the legacy of Self-knowledge for all humanity, but it must be shared and practiced, and honored in our educational systems as well. Without knowing ourselves, all other knowledge is limited and cannot take us beyond sorrow. Let us not forget

this simple eternal wisdom of Self-awareness that easily gets lost in all the information that we are deluged with every day.

- **Self in Bhagawad Geeta**

Bhagavad Gita is part of the great epic Mahabharata, a widely popular mythological story in Hindu philosophy; part of Bhishma Parva, Gita is almost in its entirety the dialogue between two individuals, Lord Krishna (considered as incarnation of Bhagawan Vishnu, Narayana) and Arjuna (the Pandava prince, Nara) in the battle field (war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the cousins, for control of the kingdom of Hasthinapura) of Kurukshetra. The Indian culture values spirituality and it is no surprise that the classical texts are replete with concepts that can help us model the process of self-growth and development. For example, the Bhagavad-Gita is full of insights, and many psychological models can be derived from it.

The Bhagawad Geeta enlightens us with several lessons on knowledge of the self and the world. Our understanding of the self is generally dependent upon our ability to correlate, interpret and assimilate information gained through observations and experiences gained through our senses. Man's understanding of the world around him is proportional to the understanding of self. There exists a correlation between self-knowledge and the outer world. The golden key to understand the universe is held within the man for those who know themselves truthfully. Self-knowledge begins with self-observation, self-examination and self-evaluation and thereby developing certain qualities that are called divine qualities like fearlessness, purity of heart, perseverance in yoga of knowledge, charity, nonviolence, truthfulness, absence of anger, compassion for all, freedom from greed, forgiveness, cleanliness etc.

The seeker of self-knowledge must remain open to the truth about himself and must remain unbiased. The exercise of retrospection is a part of this process and it should be complemented with spiritual practices and the calming of the entire personality and one's inert nature.

According to Bhagawad Geeta, the knowledge is covered under the veil of ignorance and hence people have false beliefs. Therefore each action, feeling, thought and tendency should be examined carefully. Each motive and intention should be evaluated to understand human actions. Each source

of influence should be examined and the response of the personality to each influence should be assessed. Self-knowledge brings in better understanding of the forces that influence man so he can better learn about his intentions.

When one completely focuses his mind in truth, he can very well test the significance of the outer knowledge by comparing it with the inner knowledge i.e. self-realization. By being aware about the truth of oneself, he can discriminate between inner and outer knowledge. Bhagawad Geeta emphasizes on the power and capabilities of individual self, and how the person alone will be responsible for his actions, growth or otherwise. “You are your choices”. “You are your destiny”. The Bhagavad Gita helps us to understand that righteousness and unrighteousness does not exist independently of the people who pursue them. Human beings have the unique gift of free will, which is given to us by the higher evolutionary manifestation of prana as mind and consciousness. We can awaken to a state where we choose to act from this higher consciousness instead of from instinct and impulse. Unrighteousness always creates chaos, misery and pain. Righteousness ultimately creates harmony and peace. The Gita teaches us about dharma and how to recognize our natural duty, an inborn sense of work, known as svabhava, and how to respond to it effectively and righteously. We should act not on impulse but according to understanding. We must discover and be true to our self and to our own particular gifts and talents. Too often our actions are directed not by our soul’s sense of duty but by our attachments and aversions. We act too often according to our likes and abstain according to our dislikes.

Supreme Knowledge arrives with the understanding that the Self and God is one—eternal—changeless—hidden Intelligence and so, is without attributes/gunas. The whole of manifest creation arises from that manifest Intelligence, as a particular mixing of the three modes of nature: sattva (as an expression of righteousness, contemplation, moderation, purity, equanimity) and rajas (as an expression of valour, achievement, ambition, desire for success, worldly desire) and tamas (as an expression of dullness, inactivity, laziness, depression). From these three attributes arise the variety and diversity of all beings. These attributes or qualities present in all of us in different quantities and concentrations determine the dispositions with which we are born. A person born with highest concentrations and quantities of

sattva would have a calm and pure disposition, another born with highest concentrations of rajas, but high quantities of sattva too, may be worldly but with strong virtues; a person with greatest concentration and quantity of tamas, some rajas, but no sattva, would be born with a cruel disposition. The specific concentration and quantity of the gunas accompany the soul into each life according to the quality of their past life karmas.

Knowledge of the universe is available to all of us, regardless of guna predominance, but unavailable to any mind attached to desire-driven action. The mind able to perceive truth through the spiritual experience of love is quiet and detached, yet engaged with an attitude of service in action. Karma Yoga is but one of the bliss-filled Yogic teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. But it is an attitude of action that can be applied to your mind and life regardless of your other sadhana. Whether you consider yourself a gyaani or a bhakti or a raga yogi, your actions should be done in service of the Lord in all and all fruits of your actions should be dedicated to the Lord in all. The attitude of desire less actions and desire less results purifies the mind and develops the qualities necessary to receive the highest knowledge and liberation from the limitations of the mind and heart. The secret knowledge is that there is love, a truth-knowing essence in the heart of hearts that connects us to one and all. There is a potential energy in the heart, and when the mind is free of all entanglement and conflicts and we dismiss the instinctive urges of survival, this energy is freed to work as higher consciousness and pure love. The result is all beings become precious to you and you find that you care deeply for the happiness of all beings.

- **Concept of self in Buddhism**

Seeking the good of others is woven throughout the teachings of the “Master” or the “Enlightened one” (i.e., the Buddha). In one passage, the Buddha is quoted as saying, ‘Wander for the gain of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world’(Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 17). At the same time, the Buddha teaches that suffering is a part of being and that this suffering is brought on by the human emotion of desire. In the Buddhist philosophy, nirvana is a state in which the self is freed from desire for anything (Schumann,1974). It should be noted that both premortal

and postmortal nirvana states are proposed as possible for the individual. More specifically, the premortal nirvana may be likened to the idea of the ultimate “good life”. Postmortal nirvana may be similar to the Christian idea of heaven. Like the other Indian philosophies, Buddhism gives an important place to virtue, which is described in several catalogs of personal qualities. Buddhists speak of the Brahma Viharas those virtues that are above all others in importance. These virtues include love (maitri), compassion (Karuna), Joy (mudita), and equanimity (Upeksa). The paths to achieving these virtues within Buddhism require humans to divorce themselves from the human emotion of desire to put an end to sufferings.

The ultimate aim of Buddhism is to overcome the pain and emotional disturbances caused by life's difficulties, challenges and stressors. The Buddha's teachings are aimed at attaining an authentic and durable happiness by cultivating a transition from self-state to the non-self-state. Buddhism holds that personal identity is delusional and each of us is a self that doesn't actually exist. Clinging to or being obsessive with the delusional self is the major cause of suffering. According to them, the eternal goal of an individual is to attain nirvana, a state of non self that involves a process of renouncing worldly things especially those which create ambitions, temptations and proud in us. Nirvana is a state of complete liberation

- **Self and non self:**

The self is subjected to worldly experiences and it can take various actions depending upon the social context. Self refers to egoism and desire driven sense of self. As long as we believe a self belongs to us, we are all an example of egoism i.e., full of selfish interests, egocentricity and self-centeredness. Thus it is assumed that egoism is a central point of reference for psychological activities, following the hedonic principle. Egoism means thinking that my own condition is more important than that of others and thus taking priority.

On the other hand, a state of non self involves renunciation of worldly things, especially those which are attractive because of egoism and desire. Personal identity or the self is delusional, such a self should not actually exist or not to be permanent. Non self means to realize that I or self is not permanent.

In Buddhism, the term *annatt'a* or *anātman* refers to non-self that there is no unchanging permanent self. The Buddhist concept of *annatt'a* is one of the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Hinduism as Hinduism asserts that *atman* (self/soul) exists whereas Buddhism says it doesn't.

- **Self in Jainism**

Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma is one of the oldest religions of India. Followers of Jainism are called "Jains", a word derived from the Sanskrit word *jina* (victor) referring to the path of victory in crossing over life's stream of rebirths by destroying karma through an ethical and spiritual life.

The central concept of Jain Psychology is *jīva* (self), a living organism, a biological being, a conjoint psycho-physical entity. Every organism is an organic unity of two distinct entities *jīva* (soul) and *pudgal* (matter), soul and body. The two are distinct entities because the nature of consciousness or soul is radically different from matter and both have opposite qualities. *Jīva* or soul is conscious, non-physical and has subjective ways of thinking, feeling and volition while matter or body is non-conscious, physical, inanimate entity having characteristic sense qualities of touch, taste, smell and color. According to Jainism, the nature of *jīva* is *chetanā* (sentience or consciousness). Life and consciousness coexist. Wherever there is life, there is consciousness. Jainism recognizes *jīva* or self as an eternal entity. Self is regarded as beginning less and as having unending continuous existence. It has neither a beginning nor an end; it is an entity which lived in the past and which continues to live in the present and which will live certainly in future too. Though it cannot be perceived, yet it has some features by which we can know of its existence. These manifest and essential features are its life-essentials (such as *indriya* or senses, *bala* or the channel of activities, *âyū* or life-duration and *ævâsocchvâsa* or respiration) which are the signs of its presence in a bodily form.

To understand the concept of self wholly, it is necessary to know what is non-self.

- **NON-SELF OR AJĪVA:**

Ajīva or not-self has been explained by Jain scholars as non-psychical entity, which is different from jīva or self whose essential characteristic is consciousness. By calling ajīva as not-self, non-self or non-psychical, it doesn't mean that it stands only for matter or physical body having some form, because its classification also includes those substances which have no forms, such as:

- **PUDGALA** (matter)
- **DHARMA** (condition of motion)
- **ADHARMA** (condition of rest)
- **AKASA** (space) and
- **KALA** (time).

According to Jain Psychology, self can be perceived directly because one's knowledge about self, which consists of doubts etc., is itself the self. And what is directly experienced needs no proof. Qualities of Jīva or self are perception and intuition which we can experience. Therefore jīva or self exists.

They also propose that self is a dynamic entity in the sense that it is the doer of deeds and enjoyer of their fruits. It awakens the body in which it exists. Therefore humans are responsible for their actions. Jainism teaches self-control which is control over desires and physiological instincts of sex and hunger. This self-control helps in building one's self-confidence and it is one of the virtues of a mature personality. Meditation is necessary for attaining self-realization.