

Harmonious Growth of Society and Philosophy in Ancient India

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Philosophy and society in ancient India were closely connected to each other as both of them regulated the lives of human beings giving them a well directed purposeful life pattern. They were developed together by the ancient sages who were great visionaries having universal perception and divine understanding. After generations of outward and inward journey and years of intellectual discipline they found out that the inhabitants of earth have a profound connection with some superior universal power which they are unaware of. Therefore they cultivated the technique of self-control and self-awareness that initiated the journey of divine realization. To prepare human mind for the final goal the sages trained them by regulating their lives by way of Varna, Ashram and Purusharthas. The harmonious interconnectivity between philosophical understanding and social functioning laid down the foundation of family and community life in India. Our unparalleled philosophical ideology and social norms make us a unique country where people were trained to follow the right path creating balance within individual, society and nature.

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Ancient India offers harmonious growth in various aspects of life. Its religious ideas, philosophical thoughts and social norms were closely connected to each other. Philosophy, being a fundamental basis of Indian society, influenced the social lawgivers who made rules in consensus with renowned philosophical teachings of their age. Peace and harmony, the prerequisite of Indian philosophy, brought peaceful and stable order to ancient society of India initiating progression and development of mankind. India's renowned philosophical teachings had deeply influenced each and every sphere of our ancestors' life. Our religious understanding, social traditions and ethical evolution were based on ideologies produced by various schools of philosophers. Ancient philosophers of India evolved few socio-cultural formulas that were supposed to sort out some most challenging problems that every society confronts. To ensure smooth running of the human life they decided to administer society by a set of rules. Their idea of civilized society revolved around the doctrine of *dharm*. According to their perception each and every soul of universe is assigned certain duties by the Supreme Authority. Under the ideal situation everyone should recognize one's responsibility and determine the right path for oneself. But not everyone is competent enough to find out the path of righteousness and follow it without having a code of conduct or a specific guideline. This initiated the process of setting up of rules by the intelligentsia. With an aim of creating a well designed civilized society the enlightened ones introduced the concept of *varnas*, *ashramas*, and *purusharthas* and many more such doctrines.

They organized the whole society in four *varnas* namely *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra*.¹ Keeping in view of one's choice and ability every individual was put in one of the four categories and was supposed to perform the duties assigned to that specific *varna*.² According to *Gautama* and *Baudhayana Dharmasutra*, a *Brahmana's* duty was to study, to teach, to officiate as priest in the sacrifices and to give and receive alms.³ To study, to give alms and to serve the country in the administrative positions or in the army were the duties of a *Kshatriya*.⁴ Duties of a *Vaishya* included land tilling, cattle rearing and trading.⁵ While the practice of handicrafts fell within the sphere of *Shudras*.⁶ Similarly it is mentioned in the *Majjhima Nikaya* that the chief source of livelihood for a *Brahmana* was his working as a priest and teacher; for a *Kshatriya*, his skill in the use of bow and arrow; for a *Vaishya*, his land and animal wealth; and for a

Shudra, his work as sickle man and labourer. This remarkable arrangement laid down the foundation of an elaborate social system contributing to a disciplined lifestyle.⁷ Each person was given the freedom of choosing his profession but after taking a decision it was his *dharm* to follow the allotted duty with complete dedication. This developed a deep sense of responsibility and inseparability among all varnas of society. Similar hypothesis can be noticed in *ashram* system that was formulated to maintain a perfect social environment. To make the maximum possible use of the limited life span of humans, their lives were divided in four sections *Brahmcharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanprastha* and *Sanyas*. Each one contained a period of twenty five years as human life was supposed to have a span of hundred years. During each part of life a person should perform the duty specified for that particular age zone. A comfortable social environment was evolved involving all the members of society by allotting duties in accordance to their age and capability. Thus each person was linked to the other imbedding a social nexus where members of society experienced intense emotional interdependence. The presence of social ties helped in their survival linking them to their kinsmen from whom they could expect moral and physical support. The *Varnashram* system provided a sense of belonging to Indians, allocating different tasks to different people in accordance to their ability and training them to do what was morally and ethically correct in the eyes of men and gods. It strengthened the society putting more efforts in flourishing a blissful society where people were trained to follow the right path creating balance within individual, society and nature. The idea encouraged them to develop the doctrine of four *Purusharthas* : *Dharm*, *Arth*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, the four basic obligations from which every person should liberate himself at the right time. *Purusharthas* provide a perfect combination of every householder's liabilities towards himself, his family and society. Dispensing one's familial and social obligations without ignoring one's duty towards his/her own material and spiritual needs is a unique feature of ancient philosophy. *Purusharthas* were the guiding principles of Indian society. A person belonging to any of the four *varnas* and four *ashramas* was supposed to follow the four *purusharthas*. If he was a *brahmachari* he was to follow his *dharm* of a true student accomplishing his duties towards his teacher, fellow students and himself. As a *grihastha* his *dharm* was to hold the reins of family looking after the elders and supporting the youngsters. He

was supposed to earn right money, to raise a balanced future generation and to fulfill their duties towards their family and society. In the role of a *vanprasthi*, his *dharma* towards the family was diminished by his duty towards society. Finally the *dharm* of a *sanyasi* was self upliftment along with the upliftment of society. Thus the social regulations were closely linked with the Indian idea of mental, moral and spiritual growth at various stages of life. According to Indian philosophy the final goal of man's life is to connect himself with the supreme man. Keeping in view, the goal the ancient Indian social regulations were formed and human beings were given the chance to follow the path of progression.

Indian philosophers were great visionaries having universal perception and divine understanding. After generations of outward and inward journey and years of intellectual discipline they found out that the inhabitants of earth have a profound connection with some superior universal power which they are unaware of. Therefore, they cultivated the technique of self-control and self-awareness that initiated the journey of divine realization. A well conceived theory of ever changing transformative cycle of life was evolved by them which suggested that all beings come from, live in and go back to a single source.⁸ There is close proximity between the external and internal elements of existence. The realization of the presence of some unknown and undiscovered supreme energy motivated the sages to find out the purpose of creation of cosmos.

No one can assess the amount of time and labor induced by them in the path of finding the supreme reality. Eventually they reached to a conclusion that the Divine Being, the creator of the universe, is constantly expanding the universe and creating new realms. All living and non-living beings are the extension of His energy. He parts away with us so that we can gain the experience of outer world and the soul can reach the state of enlightenment which the Creator wants us to attain. Only then the cycle of creation will be completed. As only a pure soul can go back to Him, all doctrines and rituals were aimed to create a chaste society. Inner consciousness was the guiding force for every member of society. Their field of contribution may vary according to the nature of job but their sincerity and commitment should be of highest level. It is the first step towards self discipline that educates us how to control of our mind and body and eventually prepares us to commence our journey towards self-mastery. This theory helped in producing generations

of committed individuals who became the architects of Indian political, economic, social and cultural arena.

Thus a harmonious interconnectivity between philosophical understanding and social functioning laid down the foundation of the family and community life of India. Our unparalleled philosophical ideology makes us a unique country. We are still known for our social regulations, religious tolerance and cultural adaptability. A journey through the path of history makes it evident that our philosophy and social set up is our identity and our strongest support system without which we cannot survive. The intermingling of philosophical ideas with social institutions helped in the growth of stable and balanced society giving way to peace and harmony. It paved way for a society where people felt connected with other beings and also with the Supreme Being. It enabled them to develop positive and meaningful social relationships together with mental, emotional and spiritual well being.

References

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