



Research Paper

How can we face the problem of suffering and lead a happy life by the law of *karma*?

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ABSTRACT: The classical Indian philosophy believes that the human life has the different stages with the combination of pain and pleasure that come from past action, but it has the trends towards the end of life i.e. the liberation as the highest goal of life. The Buddhist philosophy holds that our life is a journey with the combination of pain and pleasure, but it starts and completes the all events of journey with sufferings. Therefore, the system concludes that 'sarvamdukyam' (all are sufferings), we cannot deny this, rather it is the unavoidable part of our life. We have to complete our journey with sufferings. But, it is not the ultimate goal (puruṣārtha) of our life. Everyone tries to lead the happy life by reducing the sufferings. In fact, if we are able to reduce the all kinds of sufferings as far as possible, we would be happy as far as practicable. But, pleasure may be different in its degrees such as physical, mental, spiritual, etc. it is true that mere gross pleasure cannot fulfil our spiritual or mental requirements; we want to achieve the highest pleasure that motivates towards the highest goal of life. But, how it can be possible? So, we have to find out the ways (the paths) by which we can solve the problem.

KEYWORDS: Human life, sufferings, painful journey, way out, law of karma, happy life

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I. INTRODUCTION

The very old but most important ethical question is, why should the good doers suffer and the wicked prosper? Or why is there discrimination or unequal distribution of misery and happiness in the world? (Ganeri, 2015, p.405). Even we very often find that one who is an evil doer enjoys happiness while a real good doer of virtuous actions suffers. What is the justification when we admit the moral principle 'the good action produces the good result, but the bad action produces the bad result' or when we regard the moral order 'nobody can deny the law of karma'? The classical schools of Indian philosophy in their systems of discussions try to face the problem of suffering and want to offer different solutions for happiness. For instance, the Cārvāk point of view on the human life based on natural empiricism as the materialistic view is known as naturalism which holds that suffering in human life may be either physical or mental or both. From the ethical point of view, the system promotes egoistic hedonism which is neither against any normal expectation nor rejects any self-interest, but accepts gross enjoyment for happy life (Kar, 2013, pp.38-41). It is also known as the Lokāyatā system of materialism that gives us a naturalistic interpretation of the evil and good. In this system, good, evil, misery, happiness, etc. exist naturally side by side in this world (Ganeri, 2015, p.409). But the Idealistic school of Indian philosophy like the Buddhist, on the other hand, maintains that it is because it comes from the actions of a past life and the results future life (Tiwari, 2014, pp. 67-69). The present life is the result of past life and the future life depends on present life, the whole life with pain and pleasure and the circle of rebirth are generated by the law of karma. Major Indian philosophical systems believe that morally conducted acts in the ethical practices produce good results for all, but unethical practices conducted for self interest only produce bad result. The first is the cause of happiness and the second is the cause of pain and suffering (Tiwari, 2014, p.68).

II. THE PROBLEMS OF SUFFERINGS

It is true that life is a combination of pain and pleasure. Though everyone desires the positive side of life and wants to enjoy the pleasure in a happy life, yet no body deny the negative side of life i.e. pain or suffering. The Cārvāka system never ignores the status of suffering, but tries to face it very bravely to overcome

the problem of suffering in the real life. Every human being accepts more pleasure and for it he tries to minimize the pain and suffering as far as practicable. In the scheme of happiness, they accept *kāma* (gross sensual enjoyments) as the primary requirement for human desire, love, affection wish, etc. From the general point of view, they want to fulfil the gross human welfare and like Cārvākawe in our common nature always try to attain maximum pleasure in order to make our individual life very happy as far as possible. For healthy and wealthy life, they also admit *artha* (wealth) as the secondary requirement (Kar, 2013, pp.38-41). The Sāṃkhya system of Indian philosophy believes that our life on the earth is nothing better other than a mixture of pain and pleasure or joy and sorrow. There are three kinds of pain – *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika*. But, all human beings generally desire to avoid the all types of pain (Chatterjee&Datta, 1984, p.279). The system holds that the two qualities of *Prakriti- rajas* and *tamas* are the two main factors of pain and suffering. The Vedanta philosophy holds that the lack of knowledge or ignorance (*Avidya*) is the main cause of suffering.

The Buddhist philosophy admits the Four Noble Truths - the life is suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the paths that helps us to be free from suffering. These are the foundation of Buddhism. The first noble truth reminds us the very true fact of our life that is “Life is suffering”. The real fact is that we cannot deny it. It is appeared as the result of past action. We want to know the causes of suffering. The second noble truth discovers the causes of suffering, these are the lack of right knowledge, unlimited desire, the past action, etc. Our unlimited desires for gross enjoyment motivate us to act something bad for fruitful results or outcomes with another desire. Even, the past actions produce the sufferings of present life. Here the ‘past’ means the past of present life and the past of the earlier life. The first two noble truths present the real negative aspect of human life. But, the third noble truth offers the positive sides of life, i.e. the truth about the cessation of suffering. The forth noble truth offers the ways of liberation (free from suffering). In fact, like a great physician or doctor, Buddha offers the first truth to indicate the illness (suffering) of human life. Though it is temporary, condition, changeable, yet it is painful, even sometimes we cannot avoid it. Then, he advises the second truth that it has causes that we can find out by investigation. After investigation, he decides that there is better treatment for this illness (suffering). Finally, he prescribes the eight-fold path as the way of treatment by which we would be free from mental illness.

Prof. T. R. V. Murti tries to explain the nature of suffering from the philosophical point of view. According to him, human being finds himself as an unhappy person and he is unable to control his emotion. Indeed, he has produced this emotion due to the lack of knowledge. Regarding this suffering, we are very sensitive, even sometimes we want to remove it by our modern technology. However, suffering is not merely an objective fact, because one thing which is actually painful to one in his feeling may not be the same to another. In fact, when we are not able to fulfil our desires with full satisfaction, then we feel suffering. Suffering depends on the specific attitude of a person or a situation that creates unhappiness. So, it is a subjective fact. (Coward, 1996, p.351).

III. UNDERSTANDING THE HAPPINESS

The Cārvākas in their scheme of life desire happiness to face the problem of suffering and for it they do not ignore the fact of suffering. From the very naturalistic point of view, they in their normal setting of life like to face the problem very boldly and desire common or gross requirements as the needs for the individual happiness and the social welfare. We cannot deny the Cārvākastand point from the practical point of view. In their practical experiences, they obviously feel that the life without happiness is nothing other than a meaningless struggle. In order to minimize the level of suffering and to attain happiness, they have taken some challenges very carefully (Kar, 2013, p.38).

However, human being is not only a combination of mind and body, but also a mixture of pain and pleasure. When we refer to the concerning people as human beings, then actually we are comparing them with animals and machines. In fact, human beings in their own nature of humanity are different from animals or machines those have some characteristics same as human beings like instinct, abilities of works, gross desire, struggle for existence, etc., but they have no humanity at all. Human feelings, realizations, mental strengths, weakness, errors, awareness etc. are very different or typical rather than animals and machines (Khatua, 2015, pp.66-67). Therefore, man is not merely a construction of gross physical body, he has the fine mind which feels, realizes, imagines, and acts many more. Buddha “Life is a flame, and transmigration, new becoming, is the transmitting of the flame from one combustible aggregate (*pañcaskandha*) to another; just that, and nothing more. If we light one candle from another, the communicated flame is one and the same, in the sense of an observed continuity, but the candle is not the same.” According to the law of karma our present life is the result of past desire and actions.

- Desire → past life → present life → future life.
- Desire → past action (cause/result) → present action (cause/result) → future life (result).

- Following this, we can say that the present existence of an individual is the effect (result) of the past causes (actions).

Our present happiness depends on the past actions. According to Gita, we should have to do our duties for future happiness. Here, duties are the obligations to the society. Without action there is no duty, without duty there is no development, without development there is no happiness. Our happy life means the life that is free from all kinds of suffering.

IV. THE PATH OF KARMA (THE WAY OF ACTION)

In the Sanskrit literature the word *Karma* stands for "action" or "deed". Any physical or mental action is considered as Karma. The results or 'fruits' of actions are called *Karma-phala* (fruit of Karma or the result of action). According to Hinduism, life is an infinite chain of results of actions (Karma) in the past. In simple words this works as "Law of Cause and Effect" or "As you sow, so you reap". It means: without cause there is no effect, and similarly without action there is no result. Karma in Hinduism (*sanātana dharma*) is considered to be a spiritually originated law that governs all life. In the Law of Karma even though an individual is considered to be the sole doer and enjoyer of his Karmas and their 'fruits', according to Vedānta, the supreme being (The Divine) plays a major role as the dispenser of the 'fruits' of Karma. Many Hindus see God's direct involvement in this process; others consider the natural laws of causation sufficient to explain the effects of Karma. From the ethical point of view we can say that "as you sow, so you reap" is an incomplete definition of Karma. The definition is complete only when the aspect of "the divine role as a dispenser of the fruits of Karma" is recognized and applied to the Law of Karma.

There are mainly three ways by which one can perform his Karma. We perform acts or deeds every moment in our life through the following ways:

Mānasika karma: The mental way of action, e.g. thinking, feeling, etc

Vāchanikakarma: The verbal way of action, e.g. talking, speaking, advising, etc.

Kāyika karma : Physical way of actions, e.g. walking, playing, serving, etc.

But, the three may be categorised in to two - the positive actions through non-violence (good for all) and the negative actions through violence (bad for all). The positive actions produce the good results, for example, the positive way of good thinking, the positive way of good talking and the positive way of good serving. The negative actions, on the other hand, produce bad results, e.g. the way of bad thinking, the way of bad advising and the way of bad serving. The three ways open the door to rethink and react because our whole life is controlled by the Law of karma.

V. THE LAW OF KARMA GOVERNS THE HAPPY LIFE

Like Cārvaka, the materialists believe that the gross enjoyment is the highest happiness of life. They do not admit the degree of happiness, but accept Gross Egoistic Hedonism which holds that gross enjoyment for the fulfilment of self interest is the highest goal of life. In fact, the majority of modern men who are materialists in their gross nature are finally unhappy, because they are selfish and unethical. Sometimes, they are harmful to the society for their unethical practices. But, the spiritualists in their extraordinary nature know how to control sense organs by which they can avoid mental illness, greed, violence, etc. that finally gives them the happy life. In the Sanskrit literature the word Karma stands for "action" or "deed". Any physical or mental action is considered as Karma. The results or 'fruits' of actions are called Karma-phala (fruit of Karma or the result of action). According to Hinduism, life is an infinite chain of results of actions (Karma) in the past. In simple words, the action or work in the law of karma refers to the "Law of Cause and Effect", in another words it is "As you sow, so you reap". The way the results of Karma are delivered in the life is the "Law of Karma". According to Gitā, our emotional functions are highly coloured by the effective-active-modality (Rājas). Our ignorance is originated from the inter-dark-modality (Tāmas). Our all sufferings are originated from the two. So, we have to control the two by taking physical and mental actions i.e. social works and meditation.

In the Buddhist philosophy, the law of karma is systematically reduced from the doctrine of Pratīyasamutpādvāda (The Theory of Dependent Origination). According to this theory, karma is the principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, total cosmic justice and personal responsibility. Our present life is the result of past life, similarly the present results are occurred due to past actions -it is very logical and follows the ethical norms. The Law of Karma recommends the principle "what you sow is what you reap" that indicates the cosmic principle.) The prediction of the Law of Karma is what is done to you is the net result of what you have done to others. One who hurts others has already hurt himself and will be unhappy in the future. Because, his bad habit returns bad results himself. According to Buddha, the right action is guided by the principle of non-violence (Ahimsa). So, we should have to practice our duties with the help of non-violence. In fact, the principle of non-violence is the gateway of the Law of Karma. The principle leads the peace and the peace leads the happiness of life.

Karma in Hinduism (sanātana dharma) is considered to be a spiritually originated law that governs all life. Bhagavad Gita offers the concept “lokasangraha”(service for mankind) that leads us unhappy life to happy life (Bhagavad Gita, Karmayoga, 20, See Jagadiswarananda, 1990,p.87). We all know that Nachiketawanted to know the nature of the sacrifice (service) that leads a mortal life to immortal life (Kamath, 2012, p.8).But why should one perform his duty for others without taking his self-interest? For answer, Lord Krishna teaches us the doctrine of non-attachment action (anāsakti yoga) –the action without attachment to fruit, and advices us to practice it in real life. It is the core message of BhagavadGītā to the mankind (Desai, 1946, pp.8-9).In the Chapter-2, verses 31-37, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that it (service to the mankind) is his duty and as a kṣatriya he should have to fight this battle to save the kingdom of Dharma (truth). The moral duties (*kartavyakarma*) or moral action without desire (*niṣkāmakarma*) prescribed by Krishna is to be considered a code of duty - a moral action to the good of society (Ganeri, 2015, p.140). Krishna repeatedly tells Arjuna, ‘O Partha, never violate the Law of Karma, do your work properly’. It means

- Owe the law of karma.
- Respect the moral principles.
- Practice karma-yoga.
- You should have to do it, because this is your duty and you can do it.
- You should have to act, you are able to do it and it is good for all.

Lord Krishna says,‘I have no duty for here and there, even I have no crisis, I have no demand to take something, but I do my duties for good for al’ (*Bhagavad Gita, Karmayoga, 22, See Jagadiswarananda, 1990,p.88*). The Gītā teaches us that it is better to die performing one’s own duty (*svadharma*) but, it is danger if one performs another’s duty rejecting his own duty(*svadharmenidhananshreyahaparadharmobhayavaha*–(*Gita, Karmayoga,35,See Jagadiswarananda, 1990,p.95*). Arjuna, as a *kṣatriya*, performed his own duty. If we do not perform our duties to the society, the society including all members would be destroyed (*Utsideyurimelokanakuryan karma chedaham, Gita, Karmayoga, 28, See Jagadiswarananda, 1990,p.89*). We as human beings, therefore, need to perform our duties to the society and it leads us to the happy life.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the world, man becomes unhappy due to the absence of right knowledge of how to do the work properly and how to perform duty properly; and ultimately he becomes a slave due to his unlimited desires. He is unfortunately misguided by the false knowledge that leads him to the unhappy painful life. It is important to say that our unlimited desires, motives, will as claimed by the ego are the real causes of suffering. There are different types of ego (individual ego, class ego, group ego, communal ego, national ego, etc.) which create the problem of suffering (Coward, 1996, p.356). Different past actions that he has done only for self interest forcefully motivate him towards the pain and suffering. He always feels he is physically healthy and financially wealthy, but the real fact is that he leads a miserable and unhappy life.In the world view, everybody in his own desire tries to get a happy life and to avoid pain and suffering as far as possible. For it every one in his own reasonable effort wants to lead the life with happiness as far as practicable (Kar, 2013, p. 41).To live in the world with a good and happy life, every man should have to understand the law of Karmaand its practice in real life.In fact, there are different levels of life that we are facing in different ways. We cannot explain the causes of these differences unless we admit the law of karma. This law can be treated as *moral causal theory*. Because the result causes the action and without action there is no result. It also maintains the rule “Good action produces the good result which is related to the God, and it proves that bad action produces the bad result which is related to the evil.” If one has the knowledge about the Law of Karma and how to put it into the practice, then he can live in this world very happily. One who owes the law of karma in the real life and practices it properly God always helps him not only for his good but for all. If we perform our duties properly and regularly to the society, we must build a new society of good work culture that gives us happy life. The modern society in its tremendous progress believes that the modern science and its advanced technology can solve our all problems of sufferings that are created from violence. Though, it is debatable matter in field of social science study. But, in this connection, the great scientist Albert Einstein said,“Science cannot ensure human happiness and fulfilment.....the science of the inner nature is the province of religion.”(Tathagatananda, 2011, p.176). He also said, “The most important human endeavour is the striving for morality in our action. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.”(Tathagatananda, 2011,p 176).

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