

‘Self’ in Indian Philosophy and Its parallel in Western Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

India has a rich and diverse history of philosophy. The integral understanding of ‘Self’ is often neglected, which is given by Indian philosophy and the western view is more popular. This essay starts with the introduction of main orthodox and heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. Then discussion on six major epistemologies followed by these schools, which follow these epistemologies in-parts or as whole is presented. Further the article looks into an analytical discussion on the concept of ‘self’ as given by these classical Indian schools, especially Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, Vedānta and Buddhism in detail. In the conclusion, the answer to the question -What is the comparison and contrast of their views with popular western philosophers such as Locke, Sartre, Hume, Descartes and Kant?, is given.

Keywords: *Indian philosophy, self, comparison, western philosophy*

India has a long, rich, vibrant and assorted tradition of philosophically. 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, (Hamilton S., 2001). These define the various classical systems or darśana, ranging from realist to idealist, dualist to monist, theist to atheist, and so on, (Phillips, 2011). 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.

METHODOLOGY

This paper has adopted the methodology pertaining to traditional or narrative literature review, i.e. secondary research, where literature related to the main terms ‘self’ is looked for answering the questions: what is self as a concept has been looked in Indian philosophy? And, how western philosophy cross roads with Indian philosophy on the subject? Literature

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related to supporting the role of spiritual intelligence has been looked for, with special emphasis on workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indian philosophical schools

Orthodox (Hindu) Schools (Muller, 1919)-The main Hindu orthodox schools of Indian philosophy are formed during the medieval period of Brahmanic traditions. The Vedas, which are the oldest and most ancient holy texts of Hindus are the source of their scriptural authority:

1. **Samkhya:** this is the oldest philosophical school (orthodox) and it postulates that everything in reality originates from 'purusha' and 'prakriti'. Purusha is 'self or soul or mind' and Prakriti is 'matter, creative agency and energy'. This philosophy is dualist in nature, which is between the self and matter as opposed to Western dualist school, which is between mind and body. According to this school the ultimate goal of life is liberation, which is soul's realization.
2. **Yoga:** The Yoga school is founded by Patanjali in 2nd Century B.C. and written *Yoga Sutras*. It follows the Samkhya psychology and metaphysics, is more on theological side. In Yoga Sutras, the practice is divided into eight limbs i.e. ashtanga, which has the influence of Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. This helps to achieve the goal of calm mind and detachment.
3. **Nyaya:** The Nyaya School is based on the *Nyaya Sutras*, which was written in the 2nd Century B.C. by Aksapada Gautama. It is based on a system of logic that has been adopted by the majority of the Indian schools in parts or whole. As in the same way as western philosophy has influence of Aristotelian logic. This school postulates that true knowledge is acquired through the sources of comparison, perception, testimony and inference. These are the only way to achieve nirvana (liberation), according to them.
4. **Vaisheshika:** Kanada in the 6th Century B.C. founded this school. It is an atomist and pluralist in nature i.e. they established the theory of atomic structure. The foundation of this school is the thought that in physical universe all objects are reducible to a finite number of atoms. The fundamental force is Brahman which causes consciousness in all these atoms. The Vaisheshika and Nyaya schools were eventually merged together. This school's only valid sources of knowledge are perception and inference. .
5. **Purva Mimamsa:** The major objective of this school is to propagate the *Vedas* and establish its authority. The followers of this school require absolute faith in the *Vedas* and have to do the regular ritual of the Vedic 'hawana'. Although in general the Mimamsa agree to the logical and philosophical prescriptions of the other schools, however they emphasize that liberation can only be attained through the teachings of the Vedas.
6. **Vedanta or Uttara Mimamsa:** The focus of the philosophical teachings of this school is *Upanishads* i.e. spiritual inspections within the *Vedas*. They concentrate on practical techniques of meditation, self-discipline and spiritual connectivity, more than any other traditional ritual. Advaita is the most popular branch of this school, which holds that the soul and Brahman are one and the same. They follow the ontology of illusion. Visishtadvaita, they teach that the Supreme Being has a finite form, and the name is – Vishnu and Acintya Bheda Abheda, theirs is a combine monism and dualism, they declare that the soul is both distinct and non-distinct from Krishna, or God, and few more.

Heterodox or Non-Hindu Schools, which do not accept Vedas as authority, as mentioned by Muller (1919), are-

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1. **Carvaka:** It is a skeptical and materialistic school of thought, also somewhat a atheistic. It was founded in the final centuries B.C by Carvaka, who is the author of the *Barhaspatya Sutras* . Carvaka died out sometime around the 15th Century as a vital philosophical school.
2. **Buddhist philosophy:** Based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhism is founded. He was an Indian prince around 5th Century B.C, also known as the Buddha. They have always questioned the concept of and perceive it to be irrelevant. Although it shares some beliefs with other Hindu schools, such as belief in karma, but mainly stands in their opposition. Buddhism preaches the Noble Eightfold Path to end suffering.
3. **Jain philosophy:** Mahavira, a saint, established the Jain philosophy in 6th century B.C. The founding principle of this school is 'anekantavada'. This states that our perception of reality is different from different angles, and no single point of view is completely true. And it is also comparable to the ideas of subjectivity in Western philosophy. They particularly emphasize **non-violence**, and preach self-control as path for attaining the salvation of the soul's or nirvana.
4. **Political Philosophy of India:** In 4th Century B.C., the *Arthashastra* was conceptualized by Mauryan minister Chanakya. This is one of the earliest Indian texts dedicated to political philosophy. In this discussions about the ideas of economic policy and statecraft are given.

Indian epistemology

It is worth mentioning the main epistemologies of Indian philosophy, as they have a relation on how self is perceived in each school. Epistemology here deals with two particular terms viz, jnana and prama. All the types of knowledge are known as 'jnana'. The true or valid knowledge is called 'prama' and false knowledge is called aprama.

There are six *pramanas* as correct means of acquiring knowledge in Indian Philosophy, (Flood G D, 1996). They are: *Pratyakṣa*, *Anumāṇa*, *Upamāṇa*, *Arthāpatti*, *Anupalabdhi* and *Śabda* , (Bhawuk D,2011). Most widely accepted definition of these pramanas are-

1. **Pratyakṣa** (perception): Two types of perceptions mentioned in Indian philosophical texts are external and internal. The perception which is empirical in nature is external; it gives us the knowledge coming from the interaction of five senses with objects of the world. And the internal perception is described that comes from the inner sense means the mind, (Matilal B, 1992).
2. **Anumāṇa** (inference): When we find out new conclusions and truth using prior facts along with one or more observations plus by applying reason is anumana, (Halbfass , 1991). E.g. when we detect smoke and infer that there is some fire, we are using this, (Kamal M, 1998). All the schools this is a valid way of acquiring knowledge, except Carvaka.
3. **Upamāṇa** (comparison and analogy): Some Hindu schools consider it as a proper means of knowledge,(The knowledge of similarity is generated by upamana. Knowledge which arises from the presence of some common factors in a thing, which was experienced previously in another thing, (Perrett, 2013).
4. **Arthāpatti** (postulation, derivation from circumstances), (Flood G D, 1996) : In contemporary logic, this *pramana* is similar to circumstantial implication, (Jha V N,1986). According to Hindu schools which accept this as means of knowledge gaining, use it to acquire conditional knowledge. Also used to acquire truths about an object and a subject in original or different grounds. As per them one must rely on direct perception or proper inference instead to gather valid knowledge, (Datta D M, 1972).

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5. **Abhava** (non-existence): Knowledge by which we immediately cognize the non-existence of an object is called anupalabdhi. For example, absence of rainfall indicates that the connection of cloud and wind has not happened, (Lochtefeld J, 1998).

6. **Śabda** (authority of word): This is statements of past or present trustworthy humans such as saints or sages, (Bhawuk D, 2011). Knowledge depends on reliable authority and also depends on a sentence or different sounds arising from musical instruments, bamboos, etc.

'Self': View of classical Indian Philosophical schools

What is 'self'? It is a question that bothered Western as well as Indian philosophers always. If you take any philosopher, Indian or Western, they all have talked about this topic. There are two major views, the Brahminical or orthodox (astika) schools of Indian philosophy, especially the Vedantins and the Nyaya-Vaisesika argue that the self or Atman is a substantial but non-material entity. And the one is the heterodox (nastika) schools in Indian philosophy, such as the Carvaka materialists and the Buddhists, question the Brahminical arguments, (Prevos, 2002).

In the Indian tradition, the source of philosophical view about the 'self' is mostly influenced by the Upaniṣads, where, as the self is portrayed "as the underlying foundation of cognitive capacities", but characterized in negative light because it itself is not an object that can be cognitively grasped, (Barua A., 2012). The Upaniṣadic statements about the self became the source texts for the different schools later on: the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and the Mīmāṃsā take the position that the unity of subjective experience required as a precondition and a substantial foundation, and Advaita argues that this psychophysiological foundation is ultimately an illusion that has to be overcome, (Mascoró, 1965). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, as a realist school, accepts the plurality of substances, including the substantial self. It has with own wish, dislike, decision, pleasure, pain and thinking. A self, on this substantialist account, is ontologically distinct from other substances, including other selves, has certain essential properties such as cognition and agency, and is capable of self-awareness, (Chakrabarti, 2001). While Mīmāṃsā, another realist school, views the self as a substantial entity, it develops an understanding of subject hood.

The Buddhists are the counterpart to the bundle theorists, for whom the self is a bundle of insubstantial events or processes. In Buddhist teaching anattā, often is translated as 'no-self', which is a direct rejection of Upaniṣadic, and later Vedāntic, teachings about self. If we talk about the vocabulary, the Buddhist conception of the self can be regarded in perdurantist terms as a collection of temporal slices of cognitions and perceptions, which through causal connectedness are sufficiently overlapping to make possible reference to as one individual, (Mendis, 1993). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, joins contemporary critics of the analysis of personal identity in terms of the memory criterion: since a mental state can be a genuine memory of an experience only if the person in that state is the same person who had the experience, psychological continuity theories cannot explain personal identity without presupposing it, (Beebe and Dodd, 2007).

Concept of 'Self': Parallels of Indian philosophy with Western philosophy

If we study the both the conceptualization of self by classical Indian philosophical schools as well as Western philosophers like, Rene Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and Sartre, we can find few concepts which have similarities. In my opinion they are not exactly same but are in many ways related to their western counterparts in bits and pieces. As mentioned before in essay, Buddhist concept of "no-self" is similar to Hume's bundle theory of self. Also, Hume mentioned that any concept of self is an illusion, which again is said by Advaita school too. I

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found *Locke's* perception of self i.e. Self is unified by consciousness and consciousness is unified by connections between mental states i.e. memory (psychological continuity through time) in parallel with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, which joins contemporary critics of the analysis of personal identity in terms of the memory criterion too.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and the Mīmāṃsā take the position that the unity of subjective experience required as a precondition and a substantial foundation, which is also a precondition i.e. "transcendental self" in *Kant's* view of self. Also I feel there is an epistemological parallel of empiricism and rationalism in realist schools, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and the Mīmāṃsā, of Indian classical philosophy with rationalism and subjectivity mentioned by *Descartes and Locke* in Western Philosophy. In the Advaita Vedantism, individual being i.e. jivatman and the Supreme Being i.e. the Paramatman are not different from each other. Then ego can be synonymous with that of self. We can discover a somewhat related theory in that of *Sartre* (*Transcendence of the Ego* book); can be assumed that whenever we try to catch the self, we can discover it as none but ego. Hence it could be presumed that in his thesis self and ego remain synonymous in nature, (Banerjee, 2014).

CONCLUSION

So, we can see at many places both the philosophies, Indian and Western have crossed the roads. Now which philosophy to follow is subjective to every human being. That will be decided by our own ontological and epistemological views. There is no doubt that Indian philosophical texts are richer and deeper in description of "self", and their essence encompasses all the levels of consciousness known to human beings. Why the study of "self" is essential? This question needs no answer as we all know, self is the center of our lives, all other areas, be it our relationships, our work or universal connectedness, they all are seen through the eyes of "self". Without a doubt the understanding of this concept is helpful to all individuals, especially psychologists and human resource managers. We as academicians have to go way deep if we want to understand and absorb its vastness with true meaning in our lives and to help others grasp that.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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