



Indian Knowledge System and Contemporary Relevance of Vedas

Rishika Verma

Department of Philosophy
Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Uttarakhand
rishika.verma75@gmail.com

Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System is ancient, rich and diverse collection of knowledge, beliefs, and practices developed in the Indian subcontinent. Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas have contributed to the diversity of knowledge systems. According to the Hindu tradition, the different philosophical ideas that were developed in the philosophical systems originated in the Vedas. In the present era, we must study them for our personal and professional development.

Keywords

Indian Knowledge System, Vedas, Hindu Philosophy

Introduction

Indian civilisation has always attached great value to knowledge with its amazing large body of intellectual texts, the world's largest collection of manuscripts, and its attested tradition of texts, thinkers, and schools in so many domains of knowledge. In the Bhāgwad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that knowledge is the greatest purifier and liberator of the self.¹ Hence, great emphasis has been on achievement of knowledge or Jnana as the goal and quest of all philosophical and spiritual inquiry in India.²

Three terms are closely connected in all discussions of knowledge- Darśan, Jnana, and Vidya. Darsana, is a "system", a point of view, which yields/leads to jnana, knowledge. When knowledge gathered about a particular domain is

organized and systematized for purposes reflection and pedagogy, it is called vidya, “discipline”. The entire body of organized knowledge is divided into two sets in the Mundakopanisad, they are- Para vidya and Aparā vidya.³ It also places a strong emphasis on self-realization and inner transformation. This is achieved through practices like meditation, yoga, and the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Despite the influence of modernization, these practices continue to be a vital part of Indian society serving as a source of guidance and inspiration for individuals and communities. Its teaching of compassion, harmony, and balance has helped shape national culture and continues to influence the global community.

According to the Hindu tradition, the various philosophical ideas that were developed in the philosophical systems originated in the Vedas, While the Vedas contain a myriad of different themes, ranging from hymns for deities and rules of fire sacrifices to music and magic, there is also scope to find in them an exemplary spirit of inquiry into “the one being” (एकम् सत्) that underlies the diversity of empirical phenomena, and into the origin of all things (was there being or nonbeing at the beginning). There are also predefinitions of concepts of ऋत (truth or moral order), Karma and the afterlife, and the three qualities (gunas), sattva, rajas and tamas, constituting nature (Prakṛti). It is in the Upanishads that develops a more strictly philosophical character, while retaining its poetic flavour.⁴

The Bhāratiya Darśan may appear to be a small book by ordinary standards but it contains a revelations about the absolute principles of Vedas, it is also claimed to be the end product of the most advanced and lofty thinking. The darshans contain the fundamental values of the ancient code of conduct. The understanding of darshans are based on the Vedas. The repeated application in real life of the teachings of the darshans facilitates the understanding of the Vedas. It may be said that application of the teachings of the Vedas, and Upanishads and the Bhagwat Geeta can only be done through the repeated practice of the preachings of the prescriptions of the darshans.

In India, there are different traditions of religion and philosophy handed down in regular succession. Although the exposition and interpretations of all the

darshans are different from one another, they have a common goal which is to acquire knowledge of the highest truth. All the Darshans have their own separate codes of conduct and propriety.

The word 'darshan' terminates in the verb 'दृष्ट' which is 'to see'. The word 'darshan' means to know, to inspect, examine, or to view with due respect. The Sanskrit saying 'दृश्यते अनेन इति दर्शनम्' defines darshan as that which enables one to see. One can see in two ways namely the large, coarse viewpoint or the minute, subtle, and delicate viewpoint. When we see with our external eyes, it is called the macro or coarse vision. When we see with our subtle internal eyes, which are also termed as 'divine eyes', 'the eyes of knowledge', or the 'eyes of wisdom', it is called the micro or fine vision. The macro and the micro visions constitute the instruments used to study any subject. In other words, if any truth exists, one can determine its veracity only by examining it with both macro and micro visions.⁵

According to the Vedic system of philosophy, nine darshans or visions are considered the most important. These nine darshans are divided into two categories. The first category is the one that has faith in and reverence for the Vedas and considers the Vedas as being beyond the need for proof or verification. The other category is that which does not consider the Vedas as infallible or authoritative and seeks independent proof. On this basis, the Darshan Shastra or Scriptures of Indian Philosophical Vision are divided into two main groups namely आस्तिक or Theist (Believers) and नास्तिक or Atheist (Non-believers). It is generally accepted that the Darshan which reposes absolute faith in the authority of the Vedas and draws conclusions based on the heard scriptures i.e., the Vedas are the Astik Branches of Indian Philosophy. The other category; in which the respective founder Acharyas, not accepting the Vedas as the authority, have drawn conclusions based on their won intellect and reasoning; constitutes the Nastik Branches of the Darshans. In the Astik Branches there are six Darśans as follows:

(1) Nyaya Darśan (2) Vaiśeṣika Darśan, (3) Samkhya Darśan (4) Yoga Darśan (5) Purvamimamsa and (6) Uttarmimamsa. The non- Vedic branches consist of three Darśans as follows:

(1) Charvak Darśan (2) Bauddha Darśan, and (3) Jain Darśan,

The Nyaya sutras attributed to Gautama, called also Aksapada, and the Vaiśeṣika sutras attributed to Kanada, called also Uluka, represent the same system for all practical purposes. They are, in later times, considered to differ only in a few points of minor importance. As far as the sutras are concerned, the Nyaya sutras particularly emphasize the cultivation of logic as an art, while the Vaiśeṣika sutras deal mostly with metaphysics and physics. The Samkhya is ascribed to Kapila, but the earliest works related to the subject are probably now lost. The Yoga system is attributed to Patanjali with the original sutras called the Patanjala Yoga Sutra. The general metaphysical position of these two systems concerning the soul, nature, cosmology, and the final goal is almost the same. However, the Yoga system acknowledges a God (Isvara) as distinct from Atman and emphasises certain mystical practices (commonly known as Yoga practices) for achieving liberation. On the other hand, Samkhya denies the existence of Isvara and thinks that sincere philosophical thought and culture are sufficient to produce the true conviction of the truth and thereby bring about liberation.

The Purva Mimamsa cannot properly be spoken of as a system of philosophy. It is a systematic code of principles by which the Vedic texts are to be interpreted for the purpose of sacrifices. The Vedic texts were used as mantras (incantations) for sacrifices, and people often disputed the relation of words in a sentence or their mutual relative importance with reference to the general drift of the sentence. The sutras of Mimamsa are attributed to Jaimini and Sabara are Kumarila Bhatta and his pupil Prabhakara, who criticised the opinions of his master so much, that the master used to call him guru (master) in sarcasm, and to this day his opinions pass as guru-mata, whereas the views of Kumarila Bhatta pass as Bhatta-mata. The Hindu Law accepts without any reservation the maxims and principles settled and formulated by Mimamsa.

The Vedanta sutras, also called Uttara Mimamsa, written by Badarayana, otherwise known as the Brahma-sutras, form the original authoritative work of Vedanta. The word Vedanta means 'end of the Veda,' i.e., the Upanishads, and the Vedanta sutras are so-called as they are but a summarized statement of the general views of the Upanishads. The most famous commentator of Vedanta sutras is Sankara, and the darshan propounded by him is called Advaita Vedanta.

The study of these philosophy traditions rooted in Vedas enhances a person's problem-solving capacities. It helps us analyse concepts, definitions, arguments and problems. It contributes to our capacity to organise ideas and issues, to deal with questions of value, and to extract what is essential from large quantities of information. Philosophy seeks to understand existence and reality through analysis and inquiry. It examines fundamental questions about truth, knowledge, values, humanity's place in the world and the relationships between individuals and society. The Vedas provide detailed descriptions, analysis and justifications of the same. They are known to have influenced human life in many ways through its impact on institutions, education systems and other aspects of society. They contain basis of metaphysical, epistemological, logical and ethical inquiry much useful to studies today. Some of the skills that Vedic philosophy helps develop are described below-

Some of the spiritual and theological questions such as meaning of life, existence of person after death, immortality of soul, and life after death are dealt with philosophically in the Vedas. It builds a personal outlook in life that can help people gain clarity about what they believe and what they must reject. It forms the basis of people's way of day to day life. Further it helps in building general problem solving skills.

The Vedas contain a detailed methodology of interpretation that helps one build skills to analyse concepts, definitions, arguments, and problems. It contributes to our capacity to organize ideas and issues, to deal with questions of value, and to extract what is essential from large quantities of information. It helps us, on the one hand, to distinguish fine and subtle differences between views and, on the other hand, to discover common ground between opposing positions. It also helps us to synthesize a variety of views or perspectives into one unified whole.

The poetic as well as verse form of the Vedas can be useful in building communication skills. It contributes uniquely to the development of expressive and communicative powers. It provides some of the basic tools of self-expression, skills in presenting ideas through well-constructed, systematic arguments and express one's own distinct views that enhances our ability to explain complex ideas without ambiguities and vagueness in ones writing and speech.

Further, poetry and hymns are known to touch people not only at intellectual level but also at emotional level. Hence , they can be useful to develop ones skill of persuasion. Construction of clear and good arguments, use of appropriate examples and non fallacious reasoning skills are important for building skills of convincing and persuasion. It also helps build and defend one's own views while appreciate competing positions, and to argue meaningfully why we consider one considers one's own views preferable to alternatives. These are useful as classroom pedagogy and education in general .

The formal aspects of the Vedic language can serve as useful illustrations of effective writing. A close study of same can help develop ones writing skills. Vedas provide important lessons in interpretive writing as it enables skills to develop examination of challenging texts, comparative writing through an emphasis on fairness to alternative positions, argumentative writing, meaningfully establishing one's own views and descriptive writing through detailed portrayal of concrete examples. The philosophical arguments of the Vedas thus provide good illustration of structure and technique that can help develop ones imagination and express the same in writing. The same can then be extended and used for developing skills of research and analysis. It can help build capacity to frame hypotheses, do research, and put problems in a manageable form. It can help make clear formulation of ideas and problems, selection of relevant data, and objective methods for assessing ideas and proposals. It can also facilitate development of a sense of the new directions suggested by new hypotheses and questions one encounters while doing research. To conclude, a study of Vedas can prove useful in building skills that directly help improve day to day life as well as build employability abilities. It can help in jobs both of academic and non-academic nature.

References:

¹ Srimadbhāgavad Gita, Geeta Press, Gaurakhpur, Publication year 2012, 4/33, 37-38.

² Sri Aurobindo says in his letter, "We Indians born and bred in a country where Jnana has been stored and accumulated since the race began, bear about in us the inherited gains of many thousands of years..." India's Rebirth, (1905), p.14.

³ Mundakopanisad, Geeta press, Gaurakhpur, Publication year 2005, 1/1/4.

⁴ Surendra Dasgupta, "A History of Indian Philosophy, Cambridge University press, publication year 1969, Vol I, pp. 78.

⁵ Radhakrishnan S. 'Indian Philosophy part II, Oxford University Press, 2008.

