



Drawing from Indian Philosophical Traditions – the ways to deal with COVID crisis

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Abstract:

The Indian philosophical thought from Samkhya to yoga to Jainism and Buddhism have always advocated the positives of a liberated soul. They have outlined the paths and directions that one should follow to overcome the suffering which one experiences in her entire life. Our philosophies have always inculcated us to value the 'self' which we all possess. The COVID -19 crisis has forcefully made us think about the sense of isolation. We could have never imagined that such a situation could affect us. Many of us have succumbed to this pressure and are now facing mental stress and anxiety. This article focuses on how the spiritual journey laid by our traditional philosophers could be utilized to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. One of the key solution to deal with such stresses, and many stresses that are yet to come is to inculcate a sense of 'spirituality' in our education systems.

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The Samkhya philosophy is a dualistic philosophy that represents reality composed of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*. Samkhya text is an approach to free man from the realm of suffering (internal, external, and supernatural) that he faces in his entire life. The existence of Prakriti (matter) is 'form' which is matter and always is in its unmanifested form. The Purusha (self) is stable, and is the 'seer' or the 'observer' (Virupakshananda, 2015, pp. 10-11). From Prakriti and Purusha, the universal reality is manifested. I shall not discuss the anatomical aspect of how the universal reality is created, rather I shall discuss more of its philosophical impact which is relevant for the article.

Suffering is something which cannot be evaded from a man's life. Samkhya believes that the suffering is the result of one's ignorance. The man uses external resources to remove suffering, for instance, by taking medications or precautions but the need is to find a permanent solution. Samkhya philosophy emphasizes on the existence of Prakriti and Purusha to help serve the aim of liberation. The

Purusha (self) is not the doer, but it is the one who sees the effect of the manifested forms. When one realizes the real action of Purusha in this sense, one attains the idea of liberation that Samkhya talks about. A disturbed mind will always see the negativities of its actions. But when one realizes with the aid of knowledge, that Purusha is distinct and superior from Prakriti, then the detachment of soul from the matter causes liberation. Awareness of one's ability to bring a change in his life, and awareness on the qualities where one should consciously put efforts to improve will create a sense of liberation in one's life (Gramann, 2016, p. 389). This is where Yoga Sutras of Sage Patanjali plays their part.

Sage Patanjali lays a great deal on the idea of *Chitta* and *Vrttis* to demonstrate the concept of liberation which can be accomplished by all. For Sage Patanjali, the use of an organ can only be possible when the mind attaches to it. For instance, the eyes are not able to see things solely, if the information is not carried in the brain through nerve signals. The mind after taking the impression of a sensation, carries further to the faculty of *Buddhi* which

along with *Ahamkara* reacts to the original sensation. This entire stuff is presented in the mind area which is called *Chitta* (Patanjali, 2012, pp. 9-12). Human mind is complex and is always in search for new thoughts. These thoughts present us with certain force which enforces us to react against it. The flow of these thoughts in *Chitta* are called as *Vrttis*. The mixture of this action - reaction is then presented to the real soul which is called *Purusha*. This illustrates with what Newton third law asserts- every action has an equal and opposite reaction (Feynman, Leighton, & Sands, 2011, p. 12).

What is the idea of universe which Sage Patanjali mentions about in his Yoga Sutras? This whole universe is guided by the activities of humans, and some actions benefit them, and some are against them. For instance, the COVID-19 affects a man in a lot of negative ways. A human mind creates a lot of *Vrttis* during this process which are always in flux, and are temporary. The 'real' man is the person which stands behind these *Vrttis*, observe them carefully and does not react to them. The *Vrttis* seems like the whole universe for us, but in reality, the *Chitta*

is one which needs to be understood (Agrawal, 2013, pp. 53-58). The *Chitta* must be brought to the state of intelligence where it could be controlled and guided towards the path of liberation which is called as "Kaivalya" in Indian philosophical thought (Desikachar, 1980, pp. 190-194). The practice of Yoga asanas and the meditative techniques are now widely discussed and used in public health domain (Manjunath & Telles, 2001, pp. 351-354).

Before progressing into the main part of the article, as to how liberation in form of 'separation' or 'isolation' 'can be seen as positive in regard to the COVID-19 crisis, I will briefly discuss Jainas and Buddhists views of liberation. The Jainism philosophy is broad and discusses lots of question from philosophical point in view. But in relation to this article, I shall discuss the concept of '*Kayotsarga*' which is composed of *Kaya* means 'body' and *Sarga* means 'attachment'. The extent of attachment is something which is endless. One attaches oneself to his body, his clothes, his food, his utensils, his furniture, his car, and so on and on. The role of '*tapasya*' is to liberate one

from his endless desires and attachment (Carrithers, 1990, pp. 152-155). Similarly, Buddhism believes in the idea of 'moderation' to suggest that one should perform '*aparigraha*' - detachment from things and food to control one's mental thoughts (Faure, 2011).

What is the common idea of liberation that Sage Patanjali, Sage Kapila, Lord Mahavira or Gautam Buddha talks about? It is not a divine action, nor it is a mere word play. The calmness of one's mind, the removal of doubts, and the existence of 'Real Being' which is attained by the practice of following doctrines is what liberation is all about (Garland, 2010, p. 93). One might question the existence of ideas of *Chitta*, *Vrttis*, or soul, but it is essential to see what role these factors play in our human life. The commonality is to follow the idea of '*atra dhyana*' and '*rodra dhyana*' - to free the mind of the anxieties and stresses, and to build one's immune system stronger to fight the problems which a man faces in his life.

The wider prevalence of COVID-19 has again created a sense of isolation in

everybody's life. Let me illustrate this with a short story. Presumably till March of this year, everybody was engaged in one or the other tasks of his/her own life. Some people travelled from Noida to Gurgaon for their office work, children spent much of their time in schools and tuitions, the old age people were busy in fulfilling social ties, and people of my generation, even if doing 'nothing' were busy eating outside, meeting friends, attending dinners and parties. Now a day came, when the government announced a complete lockdown. The situation where most people then ended up was either with oneself or with their own families. Obviously, some people entwined themselves in working from home, but a majority of them felt that loneliness of not doing those activities which they once performed daily. The addition of loss of jobs specifically for those who sustained on a daily wage basis hardened the life of those workers.

The concept of 'isolation' was then thrown amongst all. We were made aware of the fact that a majority of us will spent time with 'oneself' rather than the others. This is somewhat an

awkward situation. How can one have spent time with 'oneself'? Whether it means to watch Netflix or Amazon Prime, or whether it means to install applications like Facebook or Instagram on phone? According to the Government statistics globally many people experienced anxiety, depression and stress leading to suicide among many cases. The tragic death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput is one of a classic example. All the above instances force us to question whether living with oneself in isolation is so difficult?

How our Indian philosophical concept of liberation might be helpful to deal with these stresses. It is important for us to recognize that dealing with mental thoughts is the first and foremost thing that one should attend to. It is essential to keep one's mind calm and be aware of the Buddhist thought that everything is temporary and is in flux. The tough moments which one experiences in their life will fade away as the time passes. One needs to detach from the ongoing materialistic stress where one has no control over them. Second, it is important for us to understand the real meaning of 'self'. We are not the doer,

but we are creator, the creator of our worries and ill mental thoughts. Everything is in the mind. Once we can control the turbulence of our mind, the turbulence of the world can then be dealt with. We need to dedicate to the so-called spiritual journey not only when the crisis arises, but daily some time should be spent on doing yoga and meditation. It is important for us to concentrate on what we are and what we can be rather than what we have become.

The COVID crisis is one of the situations that has affected us today, however, for thousands of years of human evolution, we all have dealt with some or the other issues and there are more to come. One cannot become weak and intolerant towards these situations. The concept of solitude that is embraced in our Indian philosophical thought is to make one aware of the 'happiness' and 'contentment' which one experiences when he is with 'oneself'. Temporary detachment from the material world, job, money or car are pity things to be worried about. Every human faces these detachments in one way or the other. The important point is to find

'oneself'. The situation which this COVID has brought us in all is something which we would have never deliberately caused for us. Nobody could have ever thought of sitting with 'oneself' among all the responsibilities which one has to fulfill. But this moment should be taken as positive to understand what we are really and how can we become better.

One solution to the above problem is to inculcate in our education system the sense of calmness which one can attain during meditation. We always raise our children to be competitive, to fight for themselves. But in addition to this, we have to inculcate a spiritual aspect among all. We cannot be together always, and one cannot always find himself with others. There are tons of situations which will come in one form or other where we will find that isolation. But in those situations, one must seek to find 'oneself'.

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