

## **Discussion:**

# **INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND ITS SOCIAL CONCERNS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA**

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## **1. Introduction**

While pondering over the topic in question, one is confronted, at the very outset, with a trend that condemns the entire orientation of Indian thought as other-worldly, a-social if not positively anti-social, and spiritual with a negative connotation that makes little room for material aspirations of man. A country that had the dignity and the pride of producing unique treatises like the *Kama Sutra* and *Artha Sastra*, apart from the entire Vedic tradition of "jivema saradah satam", "pasyema saradah satam", the Upanishadic precepts like "kurvann-eveha karmani jijiviset satam samah", and the Vedic words of wisdom like "kevalagho bhavati kevaladi" or "bhunjante te tvagham papa ye pacantyatma karanat" of the *Bhagavad Gita*, to guide us in our day-to-day existence for living a long, meaningful life without being lost in one's little ego, has been ironically branded as other worldly because of certain misconception regarding *mukti* or *moksa* as the highest ideal of man where one is to seek and find salvation for one's own self alone with absolute indifference to social problem.

The allegation that the East, lost in mere contemplation or meditation, has been impervious to the environment and the world around would not appear to be entirely baseless, of course, if and when we fix our attention on those periods of history when the best of our culture and philosophy was definitely on the decline; but in order to understand the real spirit of our age-old philosophy and culture of India it is not adequate, not even fair, to concentrate only on those periods of decline or on certain degenerate practices that might be prevalent in the society. What is required is a bit of excavation work and assessment as well as

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reassessment of its values so as to make them intelligible with a proper reference to the context, without making any distortion under the influence of our contemporary fads or fancies, imported mostly from outside, or passing judgement with the arrogance of a so-called modern man assuming the birthright of enlightenment simply because one is born later. And this by itself is the most onerous duty for us to perform and the most difficult one for that matter, belonging as we do to a later age representing a time-honoured culture and philosophy that is waiting for, and is badly in need of, such a proper assessment and reassessment of its values for which it has stood from time immemorial, so to say.

## 2. The Four *Purusarthas*

With this short preamble, I proceed to examine the concept of fourfold *purusartha* (ends of human existence) of which *moksa* is, of course, supposed to be the highest *purusartha* in the Indian context, but where at the same time dharma governs the entire day-to-day life and conduct of man as well as the social order to which he belongs, along with the two other important ends, namely, *artha* and *kama*. Fulfilling these goals on the individual plane involves social considerations in some form or the other. Here I shall be dealing with 'dharma' only as example of how and to what extent this is relevant to our social concerns.

## 3. Dharma

The word 'dharma' is not easily translated into English language. dharma has been used in different contexts to mean different things no doubt, but it is usually understood as that principle or law which sustains, supports or maintains (*dharayati*)<sup>1</sup> the individuals as well as the social order, and when applied beyond the context of the society in a broader universal context, it would mean that law which sustains or maintains the world as a whole, the universe itself. It may mean a supporting principle that is inherent in things themselves; it may also mean that principle which needs to be followed for the sustenance of the individuals and the society. Radhakrishnan in his *Religion and Society* talks of dharma as "the norm which sustains the universe, the principles of a thing by virtue of which it is what it is". In the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* I.4.14, we find dharma

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Mahabharata: Dharanad dharmam ity ahuh dharmo dharayati prajah/*

being identified with *satya* or truth and being extolled as the most powerful of all, stronger than even the ruling class. It is possible for a weak man who is righteous to vanquish one who is merely physically strong and therefore, there is nothing greater than dharma. Like the Rgvedic *ṛta* or the invincible moral order, dharma is supposed to have the supreme authority; *ṛta* of *Rgveda*, as a matter of fact, is an antecedent of dharma where it finds more varied application, in the context of the universe, society, as well as the life of the individuals.

Traditionally, it is to be noted, however, that dharma has been practically identified with the *varnasrama dharma*, the duties assigned to men in accordance with their particular class (*varna*) and station (*asrama*) of life. Norms for people belonging to different class, Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya, and Sudras, and also belonging to different stations of life such as *brahmacarya* (student life), *garhasthya* (family life), *vanaprastha* (life of retirement) and *sannyasa* (life of renunciation) are usually fixed and they are not to be transgressed if the social balance is to be maintained. Social concerns are thus never lost sight of in the Indian context but all this is adhered to rather with the ideal of having a perfect social order in which men of different aptitudes and capacities belonging to different age-groups would find it easy to function for the total welfare, provided, of course, they are in tune with the system. Even the rulers are supposed to follow this order, as is envisaged by the great Kalidasa in his *Raghuvamsa*<sup>2</sup>. It is at the same time taken to have a larger significance in view of the fact that it is supposed to sustain the individual in his spiritual progress towards perfection as well as the society as a whole. An individual or a group in this framework can be said to be free and is supposed to have rights only to the extent it is possible within the framework of *varnasrama dharma*. Freedom as it is conceived in the Indian context is therefore never unbridled nor are rights given to the individual or a group unlimited. It is only in the final stage, only when one becomes a *jivanmukta* (liberated while alive) that he transcends the sphere of injunctions and prohibitions and becomes free from all obligations. But this cannot hold good in case of people in general; they are strictly bound by the duties assigned to them (dharma) in accordance with their respective *varna* (class) and *asrama* (station). The maintenance or the

<sup>2</sup> *Raghuvamsa 1: Saisaivabhyasta-vidyanam yauvane visayaisinam vardhakyē munivrttinam yogenante tanutyatam/*

sustenance (*dharana*) of a social order and also of the individual is thus fundamental to the concept of dharma. Dharma by itself is envisaged as ensuring worldly prosperity as well as *moksa* (*yato'bhyudaya-nihisreyasa siddhih*).

### 3.1. Different Forms of Dharma

There is also another usage of dharma, according to which dharma refers to certain rules, e.g., those of a class (*kula dharma*), those of particular place (*desa dharma*), rules of a particular period of time (*yuga dharma*) and the like. There are even certain provisions for deviation from normal rule at the critical hour (*apad dharma*). Even here dharma is that which sustains (*dharana*) the individual as also the society. 'Dharana', maintenance, or sustenance is thus the key-idea centering around which the concept of dharma is found in general to have developed.

The expression, *sanatana dharma*, is found in the traditional literature to refer to the unflinching, unshakable laws, those rules or norms which have always been valid and are accepted in tradition. In the *Mahabharata*, the words "esa dharmah sanatanah" are used for sanctioning some social norms as obligatory. In the *Dhammapada*, the well-known Buddhist text, we find the expression *esa dhammo sanantano*, e.g., *nahi berena berani samantidha kudacanam, aberena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano*. "It is an eternal principle that enmity is not pacified through non-enmity of friendliness". Manu speaks of the traditional norms of the countries, classes, and families which have been firmly established (*desa dharman jatidharman kuladharmams ca sasvatan*) and also uses the expression *sanatana dharma* to point to the particular norms, e.g., for the king or the warrior.

The laws or the norms may be modified from time to time according to the needs of the society, perhaps, but dharma on this view in its essential features remains the same. That is how dharma is supposed to be *sanatana* or everlasting with something compelling about it. Dharma is the only friend, says Manu, that accompanies one even in death; all the rest perishes with the body. In spite of differences in respect of special dharmas, Manu speaks of *samanya dharmas* for all, irrespective of class or station, and five virtues constituting common dharmas for all, *ahimsa, satya, asteya* etc.

In case of *sanatana dharma*, its universality and the unshakable characteristics are most important: Take the case of a simple dictum, e.g., in *Valmiki Ramayana, Sundara Kanda*, where it is pointed out that doing good to a person in exchange of some good already done to oneself by him is a firmly established norm (*krte ca pratikartavyam esa dharmah sanatanah*<sup>3</sup>). These words are uttered by Mainaka before Hanuman when the former, as a token of gratitude, invites the latter to take rest on his peak. It is an established norm that one ought to pay one's gratitude in return for the good done to him by some one else; but there is also the implication here that it is a universal, unshakable and an unfailing norm to be followed by one and all. There is something compelling and everlasting about it, a principle, a norm which ought to be followed by one and all irrespective of their specific commitments. *Sanatana dharma* thus refers to some such eternal and universal norm. When the Raksasa Viradha, however, instructs Rama to throw his body inside a huge pit as it is the *sanatana dharma* for the demons, namely, their dead bodies are disposed of in this manner. Here the word *sanatana dharma* refers to some rule that is only an established practice or custom, something merely traditional. *Avate capi mam rama niksipya kusali vraja, raksasam gatasattvanam esa dharmah sanatanah*<sup>4</sup>. It is important that both these aspects should be highlighted in the context of *sanatana dharma*. Its eternal and universal nature as well as its being a well-established traditional norm, both these aspects are found to be highlighted in the traditional literature. When the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of *kuladharmah sanatanah*, or when Arjuna expresses his anxiety over the possible destruction of the established rules of class and family<sup>5</sup>, there is evidently an emphasis on the traditional values of a particular society or clan in that case. These established traditional values are binding of course but they can be modified according to circumstances; during the time of *apaddharma* (the rule for the critical hour), for example, *jatidharma* or class duties could undergo modification. But when Krsna is regarded as *sasvata dharma-gopta*, he is to be regarded not merely as "a protector of

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<sup>3</sup>Valmiki Ramayana, Sundarkanda, 1-113.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Aranya Kanda, 4.22.

<sup>5</sup>Bhagavad Gita, I

the established norms", as Wilhelm Halbfass<sup>6</sup> would call him, but the implication is that Krsna is the protector of dharma that is universal and eternal, something that is binding for one and all.

Dharma, according to Dandekar, "has always been regarded as not being static. The context of Dharma has often changed in the changing context of time, space and environment"<sup>7</sup>. It may be true so far as it goes, but for the Indian mind, it is also a fact that there is a sort of irrepressibility associated with the concept of dharma which cannot be lost sight of. Dharma is venerable, eternal and universal (*esa dharmah sanatanah*). Dharma stands for both the changing as well as more or less permanent-values.

When we deal with the cardinal values like truth (*satya*) or non-violence (*ahimsa*), our footing is on a firmer, a surer, ground than when we talk of duties of a clan or a class. In these cases also controversy is unavoidable, for we have to take into consideration certain concrete situation or a context in order to understand and apply these concepts. In a different and a new situation *satya* or *ahimsa* in the traditional sense may not hold at all on account of some overriding reasons. *Satya*, in certain context, may be very far from being a mere simplistic adherence to speaking the literal truth, as Kazi Nazrul Islam<sup>8</sup> has pointed out, and *ahimsa* may be practised through destruction of evil-doers, as Ambedkar<sup>9</sup> has remarked. It implies that the sustaining value of dharma is contextual. *Sadharana dharmas* are also meaningful and applicable with reference to the context. It is inevitable that in a complicated situation we should be called upon to make a choice and pass our judgement in accordance with the scheme of values chosen by us; this is unavoidable as the matter stands.

In our day-to-day existence in the society and in our inter-communal or even inter-national transactions it becomes necessary that a deliberate

<sup>6</sup>W.Halbfass, *India and Europe*, (State University of New York Press, 1988), p.344.

<sup>7</sup>R.N. Dandekar, *Exercises in Indology* (Delhi, 1981), p.345.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. "Mithyavadi (Lier)", *Unnatasira* (Calcutta, 1972), p.4.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. K.S. Murthy, "On Some Views of Ambedkar", *Indian Philosophy since 1498* (Dept. of Philosophy, Andhra University, 1982), p.134.



choice be made in favour of values such as those which Sita would designate as *sadhu dharma* in the *Valimiki Ramayana*, the dharma that respects the dignity of others as much as it respects one's own. Mark her words in the *Valimiki Ramayana, Sundara Kanda: Yatha tava tathanyesam*<sup>10</sup> (as in your case, so in the case of others), while giving a piece of advice to Ravana concerning protection of women, *sadhu dharmam aveksasva sadhuvratam cara, yatha tava tathanyesam raksya dara nisacarat*

This was the universalisable ethical principle suggested by Sita as against the *raksasa-dharma* (group morality) proposed by the King of Lanka, Ravana, *svadharmo raksasam bhiru sarvadaiva na samsayah, gamanam va papastrinam haranam sampramathya va*. Far from being a weakling in any sense, Sita appears here as a unique figure of morality, both as a model and also as a teacher, whose greatness vis-a-vis Ravana's physical prowess becomes all the more manifest at such places.

Justice can be ensured if an equal treatment is meted out to people irrespective of the fact whether they belong to us, to our clan, our community, or not. The concept of fairness, according to Rawls<sup>11</sup>, is fundamental to justice. And the idea of fairness is inherent in the notion of *sadhu dharma* as envisaged in the *Valimiki Ramayana* and propagated through Sita's advice to Ravana.

To me it appears that *Varna-dharma* can be an example of *sadhu-dharma* if and only if *varna-vyavastha* (class principle) is determined by *guna* and *karma* alone, as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*, not by birth. *Guna* and *karma* are not entirely determined by birth and heredity; environment as well as personal efforts and aspirations of the individual have a significant role to play in this regard. And what is more, *guna* and *karma* are not fixed once and for all.

Is the *varna* traditionally sanctioned to be determined by birth or by *guna* (quality) and *karma* (action)? The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of four *varnas* (classes) to be determined by *guna* and *karma*, no doubt, but how

<sup>10</sup>*Valmiki Ramayana, Sundara Kanda, 21.7.*

<sup>11</sup>Cf. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.LXVII, (April 1958).

does one come to have the *guna* and *karma* which determine his *varna*? Although there is no definite mention of birth in this connection, it cannot escape our notice that there is a sort of immutability involved in the concept of *varna* in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* speaks of *svadharma* (duties that are intrinsic to one) which is immutable and the idea is that no one should try to transgress the limits of his *svadharma* which is intimately connected with his *svabhava* (intrinsic nature). *Svadharma* and *svabhava* could, however, be seen to have a more dynamic base, in so far as they are connected with changing *gunas* and *karmas*, not with birth.<sup>12</sup>

I am, therefore, in favour of what I would call a dynamic *varna vyavastha* which can do justice at least to different sections at different times according to their needs and duties, and this can be regarded as *dharma* sustaining the society on principles of justice. *Dharma*, in this sense, would be dynamic, not static or fixed once and for all by birth. It is significant that in the Indian context *jati-dharma* (duty of the class), though considered important in its own sphere, has never been regarded, in any case, as the *parama-dharma*, the highest of the best duty/principle. Manu asks us to give up that *dharma* which results in one's misery and the suffering of other people in the society.

### 3.2. The Paradigm of *Jivanmukta*

If *jati-dharma* is not the *parama-dharma*, the best one, what then is the *parama-dharma* in the Indian context? The highest, the best, model of conduct in the Indian tradition is expected from a *vidvan* in the sense of a *jnani* (a wise man) or *jivanmukta* (the liberated person) who, though embodied, does not have any selfish desire and is engaged in activities out of spontaneous overflow of the altruistic tendency. The same is true of a *bhakta* (devotee), as also a *yogin*; in different context, and therefore, either *bhakti*<sup>13</sup> (devotion) or *yoga*<sup>14</sup> (meditation) is extolled as the *parama-*

<sup>12</sup>Cf. *Manu Smṛti*, 4.176: *Parityajet artha-kamau yau syatam dharma-varjitau, dharmam capy asukhodarkam loka-vikrustam eva ca!*

<sup>13</sup>Cf. *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*: *Sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhoksajel!*

<sup>14</sup>Cf. *Bhagavad Gita*: *Yogi param sthanam upaiti cadyam, and also Ayam tu paramo dharmah yad yogenatmadarsanam/ and Nasti yogasamam balam!* as quoted in Gopinath Kaviraj, *Notes on Religion and Philosophy* (Varansi, 1917), p.199



*dharma*, as the case may be. The characteristics that are attributed to a true devotee, a *jnani* or a *yogi* are more or less the same, where transcendence of some sort is highlighted both in the personality and the conduct of these models of humanity. They, being *gunatita*, transcend three *gunas*, are *sthitadhi* or *sthitaprajna* (men of balanced attitude and a tranquil mind) and are more or less *samadarsi* or *samabuddhi* (men with an impartial eye or mind) transcending the usual opposition and conflicts of duality such as pleasure and pain, gain and loss, good and evil, friendliness and enmity, and the like<sup>15</sup>. In a sense, therefore, the opposition between the so-called *dharma* and *adharmā* in the narrow sense is transcended in this highest stage of human development. Here man is supposed to be free from the dichotomy, the opposites, of *dharma* and *adharmā*.<sup>16</sup>

But the crucial issues are whether such a man is supposed to be indifferent to, callous about, the society and its problems. True, there is a sort of "super-moralism, the state of being beyond good and bad"<sup>17</sup> set up as a model here where the life and conduct of the enlightened person are supposed not to be subject to normal ethical considerations; but from this it does not follow that the enlightened person could be immoral. Wherever it is stated that evil actions do not affect him, i.e., the enlightened person, it is to be construed as a praise of the state of enlightenment, *Brahma-jnana-mahatmyam*, as Sankara would call it<sup>18</sup>. This does not and cannot mean that the enlightened person as a matter of fact could indulge in evil actions, because there would be an obvious anomaly to speak of an immoral *jivanmukta*. As a matter of fact, the *jivanmukta* is beyond the polarities

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Ibid. *Suhrnmitrāry udasina madhyastha dvesya bandhusu sadhusv api ca papesu samabuddhir visisyate/* and also *sunī caiva svapake ca panditah samadarsinah/* etc.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Mahabharata*, XII, 337 40: *Tyaja dharmam adharman ca ubhe satyanrte tyaja/ ubhe satyanrte tyaktva yena tyajasi tat tyaja/* etc.

<sup>17</sup>R.D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanisadic Philosophy* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1968) p.224.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. *Chandogya Upanisad*, IV 14.3: *Yatha puskara-palasa apo na slisyanta evam evamvidi papam karma na slisyanta iti/*. Cf. Sankara's commentary on the above, *Srunu tasya mayocyamanasya brahmano jnana-mahatmyam yatha puskarapalase padmapatra apo na slisyanta evam yatha vaksyami brahmaivam-vidi papam karma na slisyante na sambadhyata iti/*

and is at the same time, and precisely because of his transcendence, immensely helpful as a guide and is a man of unparalleled benevolence doing good to the society with a rare spontaneity. A unique status is assigned to *jivanmukta* in the Indian cultural milieu; here is a model of spontaneous goodness flowing from the intrinsic nature of one who is not entangled in polarities.

But what is this spontaneous goodness supposed to be? If it is spontaneous, can it be good in the ordinary sense? In the ordinary parlance we speak of goodness only when there is a moral choice and when the choice is genuine. If there is no genuine choice left for the *jivanmukta*, can he be regarded as good in any sense whatsoever? Rather it would seem as if *jivanmukta's* activities could be only mechanical and automatic, and, therefore, not good in any sense when there is no possibility of his becoming evil under any circumstance. The vital question at issue here is whether the situation envisaged in this context where the *jivanmukta* chooses the good over evil because of his natural inclination for the good reduces the *jivanmukta* to the status of an automation. I do not think so. Goodness is spontaneous in the *jivanmukta* only in the sense that it becomes his second nature,<sup>19</sup> so to say, to do good, to choose good over evil. Although, the theoretical possibility of a *jivanmukta* choosing evil over good under any circumstance cannot be ruled out altogether, such a possibility is never actualized in his case simply because the choice of good over evil becomes natural to him to in other words, it becomes his *svabhava*. I do not think that there should be any inconsistency in visualizing some such situation in the case of a *jivanmukta* and his spontaneous goodness.

An enlightened person is described by Sankara as both *vimuktasanga* and *sadapara-dayambu-dhama*<sup>20</sup>. Acarya Sankara is very clear about the life and conduct of such men of wisdom, the enlightened ones. There are great souls, says Sankara, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring (*vasantaval lokathitam carantah*)<sup>21</sup>, and who having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Suresvara, *Naiskarmya Siddhi*, IV.69: *Utpannatma prabodhasya tvadvestrivadaya gunah ayatnato bhavanty asya na tu sadhana-rupinah/*.

<sup>20</sup>*Viveka cudamani*, 486.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* 37

others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever. Here the words 'Vasantaval lokahitam carantah', doing good to the world like spring, refer to the spontaneous goodness of the enlightened. It is indeed a pity that this spontaneous goodness of the freeman in the context of Indian thought has not been sufficiently highlighted, while the free man's (*jivanmukta's*) life has been depicted as one of sheer moral indifference and callousness by those who are alienated from Indian thought and culture in some way or the other.

### 3.3. The Ideal of Bodhisattva

The free man in the Buddhist tradition is also one who is free from attachment, free from strong likes and dislikes. *Granthih tesam na vidyante yesam nasti priyapriyam*, says the *Dhammapada*. *Tasmat prajna na tam icchet icchato jayate bhayam*, says *Bodhicaryavatara*. Freedom is achieved through the realisation of *sunyata*, according to one of the most important trends of the Buddhist thought. In *Bodhicaryavatara-panjika* it is explicitly pointed out that *sunyataiva nirvana-karana, sunyataiva bodhimarga iti sthitam*. This is true of the entire Bodhisattva tradition, of course.

Inequality is manifest on all sides to even a casual observer, and is a matter of day to day experience, so to say. Equality comes with enlightenment only, which makes one free. A wise man who is established in Brahman is also established in equanimity as well as equality. The wise (*pandita*) would look on a Brahmin endowed with learning and culture, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a pariah with an equal eye (*sama-darsinah*), says the *Bhagavad Gita*. The mortal plane is conquered by those whose mind is established in equality (*samya*), for Brahman is free from blemish and is equally present every where, and the wise men are established in Brahman<sup>22</sup>. *Astavakra Gita* similarly speaks of a person having self-knowledge being equally disposed to all. *Sa eva dhanya atmajnah/sarva-bhavesu yah samah*.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. *Bhagavad Gita*, 5.18 and 19. Cf. Also *Sankara Bhasya: Samam ekam avikriyam brahma drastum silam yesam te panditah sama-darsinah/* (5.18) and *Yesam samye sarvabhutesu brahmani samabhava sthitam niscalibhutam manah antahkarmam/* (5.19).

Equality, however, is inculcated in quite a different way in the Buddhist treatises like *Bodhicaryavatara* although here also it is a question of enlightenment. Here it is based on realising the similarity of our pleasure-pain-experience. "When both myself and others are similar in that we wish to be happy and do not want to suffer in any way, what then is so special about me? Why should I strive for my happiness alone? Why should I protect myself and not others?"<sup>23</sup> asks Santideva. I should dispel the misery of others because it is suffering just like my own, and I should benefit others because they are sentient beings just like myself<sup>24</sup>. The realization of similarity leads to an altruistic form of life. There is no absolutistic ontology, no ontology of Brahman, involved here. The comprehension of *sunyata* alone leads to cessation of suffering here, *sunyata duhkhasamani*<sup>25</sup>, but this *sunyata* which is emphasized in nothing but *nihsvabhavata* (essentialness) and is not meant to be adhered to as a metaphysical doctrine<sup>26</sup>.

The argument advanced for viewing others as equal is quite simple and straightforward. It is based on our ordinary, day-to-day, experiences of *sukha* (pleasure) and *duhkha* (pain), that is all. That is why in the *Dhyana-paramita* chapter of *Bodhicaryavatara* we are asked first of all to make an effort to meditate upon the equality between self and others. We are asked to protect all beings as we do ourselves because we are all equal in wanting pleasure and not wanting pain<sup>27</sup>. The sense of equality arising out of deliberations upon our day-to-day experience of pleasure and pain makes us concerned for others, as we are concerned for ourselves. This typically empirical approach of *Bodhicaryavatara* is asymmetrical in so far as it is not based on any absolutistic metaphysics of Advaitic Brahman as is the case with a *jivanmukta*.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, 8.95 and 96.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 8.94: *Mayanya-duhkham hantavyam dukhatvad-atmadukhvat, anugraha mayanyepi sattvatvad-atmasattvat!*

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. 9.56.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Prajnakaramati, *Bodhicaryavatarapanjika*, 1.34: *Sunyatayam api nabhinivesah kartavyah!*

<sup>27</sup>Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, 8.90: *Paratma-samatamadau bhavayed evamadarat, samadukha-sukha sarve palaniya mayatmat!*

Moreover, there is a positive emphasis in the Bodhisattva tradition on the alleviation of the suffering of others even at the cost of one's personal comfort. *Karuna* is the deciding factor here. *Karuna-paratantrataya paraduhkha-duhkhinah sarvaduḥkḥapaharanaya yatnah*, says Prajnakaramati<sup>28</sup>. If by one person's suffering the suffering of many would be destroyed, surely kindhearted people would accept it for the sake of themselves and others. In this context the example of Bodhisttva Supuspacandra, who sacrificed himself and allowed himself to be harmed by the king for the eradication of the misery of many is cited by Santideva<sup>29</sup>. Hence an altruistic temper permeates the conduct of Bodhisattva, which, to all appearances may be similar to the spontaneous goodness of a *jivanmukta*. What is important to note here is that even *moksa* or liberation for one's own self is not valued for its own sake by the Bodhisattva. Freedom of the Bodhisattva is primarily altruistic, not self-centric. There being *pararthaikanta trsna* or longing only to do good to others, one does not care for one's own liberation, and there can be no question of indulging in self conceit or wonder on account of this either. *Atah parartham krtvapi na mado ca vismayah!*<sup>30</sup>. Doing good to others is spontaneous on the part of the Bodhisattva as it is in the case of a *jivanmukta*. In this sense there is similarity no doubt, but there is also asymmetry in so far as there is a goal of freedom for mankind as a whole in one case, whereas there is an emphasis on the achievement of one's own freedom in the other. Both *jivanmukta* and Bodhisttava would however, work undoubtedly for the benefit of the society and mankind as a whole. Bodhisattva has no metaphysical axe to grind, nor is he interested in his own freedom so much as he is interested in the freedom of mankind.

Santideva's following remarks need a special mention in this connection as they are very significant and illuminating. "Will not the ocean of joy that would be there when all become free", asks Santideva, "be sufficient for me? What am I to do with my liberation alone?"<sup>31</sup>. The altruistic element is thus fully explicit in the Bodhisattva ideal, though at

<sup>28</sup>Prajnakaramati, *Bodhicaryavataṛpanjika*, 8.103.cf. also *ibid.*, 9.1: *Yathabhutadarsino bodhisttvasya sattvesu mahakaruna pravartate!*

<sup>29</sup>Santideva, *Bodhicaryavathara*, 8.106.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.109.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.108.

the same time it cannot be said to be entirely absent in the ideal of the *jivanmukta*, for altruism is ingrained in some from or the other in both of them.

The knower of Brahman, for Sankara, is *kevala-paranugraha-prayojano*<sup>32</sup>, one whose sole objective lies in doing good to others. Altruistic tendencies are thus very much ingrained in him. Even if one may have nothing to do for one's own self because of the self-realization, he has to engage himself in activities conducive to welfare of others, says Lord Krsna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, 3.25. *Kuryad vidvans tathasaktas cikirsur loka-samgraham*<sup>33</sup>, as he himself sets the example in this regard. Acarya Sankara, the great Advaitin, with all his opposition to any intermixture of action with knowledge, in his Bhasya on this verse of the *Bhagavad Gita* clearly points out, *kartavyabhava api paranugraha eva kartavya iti*.

So from all this it becomes evident that at no time in an individual's existence is social consciousness either irrelevant or only secondary in importance in Indian thought, not in the beginning or in the middle and not even when one transcends the dichotomy of dharma and adharma as a *jivanmukta*. Serious consequences are in store for even the spiritual or religious heads who ignore the environment and violate the principles of righteousness by causing detriment to the entire social structure, as is evident from the incident narrated in the *Valmiki Ramayana, Uttarakanda*, where even a Brahmin is threatened with dire consequences if he violates the principles of righteousness (a truly pragmatic application of the doctrine of *karma* which does not prohibit us to alleviate the suffering of others but very rightly keeps us away from action that harm the well-being of others). With the admonition given to abstain from anti-social activities in a provocative and paradoxical language - *tasmat sarvasv avasthasu*

<sup>32</sup>Upadesa Sahasrsi, 1.6.

<sup>33</sup>Here 'loka samgraha' obviously takes into consideration social solidarity along with the good of the people in general. People in general, the ordinary mass as they are called, are considered important from the strictly philosophical point of views also. Vacaspati in his *Tattva Kaumudi* points out explicitly that the "Samkhya philosophy speaks of three *pramanas* only, because these alone give knowledge to the ordinary people who are eligible for the same" Cf. *Samkhya Tattva Kaunudi*, 4.3.



*kaulapatyam na kararyer*<sup>34</sup>, 'one must on no account be made/become the head of a spiritual institution.'

#### 4. Conclusion

Now I think, I should stop here; I am to conclude. Social concern and its problems are multifarious as well as endless. Indian philosophical ideas dealing with them in some form or the other are inexhaustible, for these have been developing, along the ages, through certain master-minds tackling both the new and old unresolved problems with vigour and sometimes with highly original insights for fresh application even in the traditional background. This in a sense is in tune with the unfailing and firm assurance given in the *Bhagavad Gita* in respect of the maintenance of order (dharma) from time to time whenever this is a downward trend in the society. True, the assurance given by the Lord who is the Purusottama, apart from being a philosophers' Philosopher, the Yogeswara, cannot be a matter of sheer philosophy, but it could be highly relevant in providing inspiration to philosophy and philosophers in action. After all, philosophy could be expected to be conducive to, or at least do its bit, for *dharma-samsthapana*, and to that extent in its own way, assist in fulfilling the Lord's promise to bring about a just social order through its ideas, provided of course, its votaries wholeheartedly devote themselves to a search for ideas of seminal importance that might be relevant to the environment where they live, move, and have their being. This precisely has been done throughout the ages by the philosopher-saints of India like Sri Caintanya, Balarama Das, Kabir, Nanak, Tuka, Basava, Ramakrsna, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. The list cannot be exhausted of course; it is given here by way of citing a few examples only. Last, but not the least, one cannot but be reminded of here with awe of the unique contribution of that philosopher-saint in action of Sabarmati who was a living example, so to say, of the application of Indian thought to the concern of his society,

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<sup>34</sup>After chapter 59, this is included in some manuscripts. However, even if this part might have been regarded as *praksipta* (an interpolation) in certain quarters, as Sanskrit commentaries on this part are not available, its importance in itself as an instructive piece in our tradition remains unaffected on my view and cannot be overestimated.

earning the title, not any of the *Mahatma* but also, of the modern Yudhisthira<sup>35</sup>, the dharma incarnate, and creating world-sensation thorough his novel insights into and application of the concept of *ahimsa* for the attainment of freedom, which in any case was not a mere political concept for him. Controversial! You may say, perhaps. But then who is not?

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. R.C. Zachner, *Hinduism* (Oxford University Press, 1966), Chapter 8 'Yudhisthira Returns', pp.170-192.