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A Grand Synthesis of Indian Ancient Philosophy on Cosmos: Discerning Ancient Wisdom from Modern Science

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A B S T R A C T

In the most ancient Indian texts, in the Rigveda, one of the hymns famously known as ‘nasadiyasuktham’ says when there was neither existence nor non-existence what existed? In profound depths what existed at the beginning from which everything else has emerged. Answers to these questions were found, in the most ancient times. In the Vedas and Upanishads, these answers are found. But the questions are asked again and again and answers are restated. It is the wisdom of the ancient philosophers but now stated in the language of modern scientists. As far as the macrocosm (the universe) concerns the ancients are contributed a lot, now our understanding is much deeper with modern physics and cosmology. As far as the microcosm (mind & consciousness) concerns Vedanta and other Indian systems of Philosophy have very valid and deep insights. This is much more than modern understanding given by consciousness studies. Modern science has an edge over ancient wisdom in describing the universe with the help of physics, chemistry and describes the body with the help of biology and physiology. But closer and closer it comes to ourselves; the ancient wisdom is better than modern science. A grand synthesis and profound understanding of Indian Ancient philosophy on macrocosm & microcosm, root cause of human suffering, ancient wisdom to remove suffering, “Law of Karma” and its implications are presented in detail in this hypothesis.

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Introduction:

Our experience of the world is subject & object, all our experiences throughout life

are ourselves and everything else out there, so the investigation into everything else

nothing but ‘objective world’ is the subject matter of ‘Macrocosm’. An investigation into ‘human personality’ is the subject matter of ‘Microcosm’. Subjects and objects are the basic structure of our experience. So, all of our investigations will be in one or the other. So, this vast universe and its beauty, magnificence its stars, planets, nebulae, mountains, and oceans. What is it and where did all this come from? What is its destiny? ^[1]

In time, our place as a human being in the universe is so little, humanity started a few million years ago in the scale of billions of years. So, we do not know, since ancient times onwards almost this is the great question from where did all this come from? Origin of the universe? ^[2]

Now comes to the most fundamental questions of humanity, what are we? What are the purpose and ultimate destiny of humanity? The purpose of life? How are we to overcome suffering? All these fundamental questions of human existence take up for consideration from ancient times.

We shall investigate this from ancient Indian philosophy which expressed in harmony with modern knowledge and its latest findings. The essential principles from ancient Indian texts are relevant even today in terms of modern physics and cosmology.

2. Investigation into Macrocosm

When we look at this universe, what do we see? One thing is that we see patterns like when we plant a seed then a tree develops grows bigger and goes back again as a seed and this becomes a plant. Here what is first is a separate question but we can notice the pattern like how water becomes vapor, goes up and dances in the space but when it reaches a higher altitude it gets transformed into water then comes down as rain falls into rivers and ponds and again later on go up in the form as vapor. This is called the water cycle. In another case, high Himalayan towering Mountains one time underwater after eons of the time

these transformed into sand goes into oceans later after millions of years becomes Mountains. After seeing this, one can discern a pattern or cycle. Today modern science has understood these facts. ^[2]

2.1. Principle of Causality is originated from Ancients

Thousands of years ago, an ancient philosopher was known as Kapila saw this pattern in nature and gave the principle of causality. From cause comes effect and effect becomes cause again for the next effect in this way cause and effect go in a cycle.

If it is to be true that nature is uniform what we see in the little slice of the world is what we experience, if this be the pattern of the universe and there is nothing to show otherwise because science depends on the uniformity of nature. So, by knowing a grain of sand we will know the secret of the universe. If it is true that nature is uniform what we see in one little experience of nature we can extrapolate that to the entire universe. This is the proposition of Kapila's philosophy. The entire universe was at one time in a seed state or unmanifest state (potential state) and then it has become this manifested universe. So, the creation of the universe means manifested or fully realized state but the origin of this is from a potential state. Hence, there must have been a state where this diversity was not there, it was in a seed state, all-stars, planets and galaxies, plants and animals are probably of a single point, Kapila gave it the name Prakriti (Nature) the root nature from which diversifies into this entire universe. This is a great principle called causality ("Sat Karya Vada" in Sanskrit). That means the effect which we see now is pre-existed in some cause. ^[3]

What is ‘creation’, cause becoming the effect, from unmanifest becoming the manifest, from manifest becoming unmanifest is ‘destruction’. So, going from cause to effect (unmanifest to manifest) is

the creation, and going back to cause is the destruction (manifest to unmanifest). The death means transforming cause to effect or vice versa like a tree dies but its potentiality is now in the seed which again germinates and grows into plant.^[4]

This is logical because all diversity that we see in the universe has come from nothing. It means creation never comes out of nothing. Something comes out of something. At the most we can say from the unmanifest manifest has come or from the undiversified to diversity has come. Like in the seed, we do not see roots, leaves, stem, branches, flowers, fruits of the tree. But they are there in the potential form in the seed. Today we understand the same in genetics and we confirmed all the information is there in the DNA form of a tree. A tiny embryo consists of entire information of the human body to transform in time. This is what understood in principle at the time of Kapila at ancient times in India.

2.2. Theory of Evolution

This is a major development in modern thought from Darwin onwards. But we find this idea firmly in place thousands of years ago in Indian thought. But there is a difference between Darwinian evolution theory and the way Sankhyans understood this phenomenon of evolution. In modern evolution theory, we understand that the genetic material undergoes constant mutation, and at the macro-level means environment keeps on changing, and some of these mutations are favored for survival because they match what the environment requires. This is broadly known as "survival of the fittest". The suitable mutation will survive and they propagate and progress further into evolution. But Kapila says, these are not the source of evolution, these are the ones which bring out the potential but the source of the evolution and why evolution happens is that all of this is potential already exist in the cause just as a particular human being develops from an embryo, as the plant

develops from the seed. It's not just because of the pressure of the environment, in the case of each individual it's the genetic material which uncoils. This was the idea of the evolution of these Indian ancients^[4]. So, all potential is there in nature and over time it evolves in the universe. This is beautifully reflected in the ancient Hindu philosophy in Dasavatar (ten incarnations of God). Where incarnations of god evolve from animal forms like fish, tortoise to half-human & half-animal to a human form, this is showing the idea of evolution of forms at ancient times.

2.3. Involution

The idea of involution from ancients is that one day this universe which all with its diversity will go back into the seed form containing all this diversity but inhomogeneous form means we cannot see stars, planets, galaxies, mountains, oceans, animals and human beings. But the potentiality of all this is now in the seed form and which will be cause for the creation of next universe.^{[2], [4]}

2.4. Theory of the Evolution became Enemy to Religious idea

One of the biggest blows to religious thinking has been the idea of evolution. After seeing, this variety of life, vast diversity, an extremely sophisticated design we find in a human body, the first reaction of thinkers there must have been a creator who designed this entire universe with all its diversity. But then Darwin came with the theory of evolution and showed all this complexity and this design can emerge out of evolution, it doesn't require an external creator or designer to create all these forms. Complex designs can emerge out of natural processes just by the process of struggle to survive and constant random mutation of genetic material it is possible to have ever most sophisticated bodies. So, with this theory of Darwin evolution, the argument for the existence of the god is knocked out. This is

a way for modern science now showing that evolution can take the role of what god in religion is supposed to do for creating the universe.

2.5. The truth of the Religion

As per the idea of Indian ancients, adding the idea of involution then the whole idea of evolution and involution are taken together actually proves the truth of religion. How does it do so, the highest in the evolution like Christ man in Christianity or Buddha man in Buddhists and freeman of the yogis called Jivanmukta (free while living) of vedantins all of this there must have been wherein potential form in the first protoplasm of life, even further into a singularity at the beginning of the universe from there the emergence of the matter, energy, space, time to the emergence of stars and planets to the emergence of life and to the evolution of life to the emergence of intelligence and the evolution of civilization to the coming of spirituality and the religion and the appearance of these highly spiritually evolved human beings in the sense of morals, unselfishness, spiritual insights all of this must have been there at the beginning of the universe also in an unmanifest form. [5] This is the idea of evolution and involution of the universe by the ancient Indians. That ultimate reality which exists at the beginning emerges as a seed and which evolves into this magnificent universe and goes back into the seed, behind it all giving it existence, making it all possible is that ultimate reality is the supreme power called 'God'. This is the actuality in saying god created this universe. This ultimate reality is called "Brahman" in Vedanta which is the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss (Sat Chit Ananda) which appear as this universe. Hence, if we combine the idea of evolution and involution then evolution instead of them being the enemy of religion will prove the truth of the religion.

2.6. Final form of Vedanta on Macrocosm

The final form of the Vedantic theory going from Sankhyan theory is that there is this existence, consciousness bliss called Brahman or ultimate reality which appears as this universe and this universe goes through a cycle of manifestation of God and transformation of nature (Brahma Vivartha, Prakriti Parinama) which is the combination of 'evolution & involution'. That means nature cycles between unmanifest and manifest this is called creation but God remaining at the background gives it entire thing existence. God is called as 'Saguna Brahman' in Vedanta means Brahman with attributes. Existence, consciousness, and bliss associated with 'nature' (Prakriti or Maya in Sanskrit) is the idea of God (Saguna Brahman) in Vedanta. [7] Going forward from Sankhya to Advaita Vedanta Philosophy the final understanding is that, there is a fundamental reality that appears as this universe in this appearance it goes through creation means the manifestation of diversity and destruction means back to unmanifest. But in the unmanifest entire potentiality is always there nothing new appears. Vedanta further says this universe is the creation of the Brahman rather it is the projection of the Brahman rather it is Brahman itself.

3. Microcosm

After examining and having considered the macrocosm and the universe, now the question is turned inwards, attention is drawn to the subject from the macrocosm to microcosm like who am I? What is the purpose of life? What am I to do in all this vast creation? What is my destiny? These are questions from the most ancient times in Indian Philosophy. When everything destroyed and the body is buried is there something left over? If something survives physical death then what is its destiny? Whence as it comes? Where does it go? [2], [5]

These questions about human beings not

as the body but about the inner person, mind, the self, and consciousness bring in to the investigation of the microcosm. Like the ancients, so the moderns, it is so interesting that consciousness studies have become so important and such a vibrant field only in the last 20 to 30 years. Before that, it is not even considered as serious research in the science which is closest to us, our minds, our awareness, our self. These closest things to human experience did not found as the subject of investigation especially consciousness till the last 2-3 decades.

Buddhist philosophy is far superior to modern psychology in understanding the mind. When it comes to consciousness what modern science has to say is trivial compare to Advaita Vedanta, Yoga, Sankhya have to say. These ancient knowledge systems seem to better when it comes to closer to the core of human beings.

3.1. Investigation into the body, senses, and mind

When we look into ourselves, in a way of an epistemology of knowledge what do we find? When I see a flower there is an object outside and there is a sense organ that takes information from the object and transmits into inwards, up here it is physical including optic nerve role in seeing and nerve center functions in the brain. Then it becomes mental and subtle means information is now presented to the mind. So, from the object to the senses to the mind. The moment it comes to senses and the body investigation comes to microcosm. There is another distinction where at one point the senses stop at the brain and play a role in the mind. It means apart from the physical sense organs role at the outer level, there seems to be sense organs role inside at a subtle level.

It's very interesting, the mind is essential for the functioning of the sense organs, even without the physical sense organs the mind can still in its way use sensory perception. What it means by, when a

person falls asleep then all physical senses are shut down but, in the dream, the mind sees, hear, smell, taste, and touch though it is not happening externally, the whole thing is in the mind. The point here is the experience in the dream also a kind of sensory perception. After awake he reports that I saw something, I heard something, experienced taste, smell, touch, etc. In actuality, he did not see or hear anything but all of that was going in the mind. So the mind can simulate sensory experiences. So therefore, senses have a subtle role in the mind as well, which means data collected externally and brought to the mind at a subtle level. In the mind there is seeing, hearing, touching going on based on the data brought by the senses, and this mind later controls the senses, which coordinates the data and directs the senses. In the Katopanishad the mind is compared to the reins of the chariot, horses are the senses and they are controlled by the reins which are the mind.^[12]

3.2. What is behind the mind is Consciousness or the Self

“Sankalpa Vikalpa Atmaham Manaha” the mind which considered the various options based on the data brought by the senses. Then it is presented to the intellect (Budhi in Sanskrit). This is another part of the subtle body. The intellect decides, clarifies, and understands. In Sanskrit “Nichayatmika Budhi” means intellect is the deterministic faculty.^[10] Even this is not the end, the whole thing now presented to the self (Atman in Sanskrit) which is consciousness. At that level, a person becomes aware of everything as an experience of seeing, thinking about, hearing, touching, understanding, etc. All the function of the senses and the mind and the intellect is lit up by the consciousness. Then perception completes. Therefore, the real self is not the body, is not the senses, is not the mind, is not the intellect but consciousness which lights up the intellect and the mind and the senses, and the body and the entire universe which is

experienced. This 'consciousness 'is synonymous with the 'Self' (The Atman).

3.3. Three components of Microcosm

Having understood the functioning of senses, mind, intellect & Consciousness, now the entire human personality can be considered into three components; gross or physical component like the body including physical senses up to the brain (Sthula Sariram in Sanskrit). Then there is the subtle body (Sukshma Sariram in Sanskrit) which is the mind including the sensory powers, intellect. Beyond this, there is self (the Atman) which is consciousness. So, the soul or self is made of consciousness and that shines upon the subtle body which is made of thoughts, sensory powers, and intellect and that pervades the physical body which is made of matter. This is the microcosm described by the ancient wisdom of Sankhyan and Vedanta knowledge systems in India.

None of this is speculative or theoretical when it analyses carefully into one's own experience. Everybody experiences physical body, subtle body like thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, desires, and ego-sense beyond that consciousness which is an unchanging witness principle. This consciousness or the real self is beyond the physical body, beyond the subtle body, and causal body (seed form of the mind). The consciousness is innate, intrinsic, unchanging from which mind borrows light of consciousness this is like a moon borrows its light from the sun. When iron is heating in the fire it becomes hot, becomes very hot later and it emits heat but none of which belongs to iron hence after some time it loses heat and becomes cold. Similarly, even the mind is not conscious, the physical body is not conscious by nature, but when the physical body and mind and senses feel conscious, all of this consciousness is borrowed from pure consciousness or self.

This can be understood by observing the states of the mind; after wake up from sleep mind feels very conscious and alert, late in

the night feels dull and sleepy, these are not the states of consciousness but the states of the mind. The same thing explained in the Vedantic text by the method called 'seer and seen' (Drig Drisya Viveka) which clearly states that waking, sleeping, dreaming and deep sleep are of the states of mind not of the consciousness.^[13] Consciousness is ever shining and unchanging light. But the mind depending upon its state sometimes channel this consciousness effectively and feels very alert and conscious or when it weakens may be due to aging even body which is closely connected to mind also get effected and slows down feels dull and tired. 'I am not as sharp as I use to be' a common statement demonstrating this truth. But the consciousness is aware of everything that when the mind was sharp in the past and now it also aware of fading memory and slowing down intellect. But there is no time when the consciousness itself becomes dull or slowing down. Swami Vivekananda describes the nature of consciousness (Atman) as "it is not that consciousness exists but it is the existence itself, it is not that consciousness knows, it is knowledge itself, it is not that consciousness is happy, it is happiness itself".^[13]

3.4. Existence Consciousness Bliss

Whenever the existence is borrowed will go away in time, which means it loses its relative existence in the conventional sense it is called death or destruction. A thing can lose its existence only when it is gained existence. Gaining and losing existence possible only if it is borrowed, it is not original or intrinsic to it. Atman existence is it means it exists intrinsically by its nature, everything else intellect, mind, sensory system, and body all barrow existence from consciousness. Similarly, the joy or bliss in the mind, in the intellect, the pleasure of the senses is gained and lost because it is borrowed from the consciousness (Atman) whose very nature itself is bliss (Ananda in Sanskrit). The

mental and emotional joy find in the mind and pleasure found in the senses comes and goes makes to feel sometimes happier and sometimes not, so the joy in the mind can increase and decrease but it neither increases nor decreases in the 'Self' (Atman) which is bliss itself. ^{[2], [5]}

Having understood the nature of the Atman that is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda), if you consider the question why not Atman borrows the consciousness and existence from something higher than that, if so, the problem will be where it does stop? It goes further and further back; it becomes infinite regress (Anavastha in Sanskrit) means a logical fault of not having a foundation. We have to stop where it is logical to stop, the self or Atman is the consciousness is the place to stop, if the self or Atman is not conscious by its nature then it leads to an infinite regress.

4. Law of Karma

The law of Karma states that whatever we do has consequences, which means what we consciously and deliberately think, say, and do has its consequences. If we do consciously what is good (Dharma) the result is merit (Punya in Sanskrit) which gives rise to pleasant things (Sukam in Sanskrit) that happen in life. If we deliberately do what is bad (Adharma) it leads to demerit or sin (Papam in Sanskrit) which gives rise to unpleasant things (Dhukham in Sanskrit) that happen in life. Therefore, according to the law of Karma whatever we see in our life now is the effect of past Karma. Whatever we do now give rise to effects in the future. ^[15]

4.1. Philosophy of Reincarnation

The law of Karma is leading to the principle of reincarnation. Why because, when a child is born, we see the vast differences across the world, one child is born in a poor community suffers from nutrition, good education, and other child

born in a highly secured and rich community. If these are the effects then where are the causes? Causes cannot be in this life because they are just been born so there must some past existence where the causes lie. So, the diversity of effects at the very beginning of our lives, if there are any cause-and-effect relationship at all then we must have existed in some form earlier. There is a common saying "there are so many evil people who did many bad things but we don't see that they seem suffering". That means we must accept the possibility that there is Karma remains to be experienced in the future. After the death of the body, one will have newer bodies where the leftover karma is to be experienced. But that is not the end, when we get newer bodies, we do more karma again and that leads to a new birth. So, the cycle of birth and rebirth fuelled or instigated by karma. ^[14]

The concept of karma and reincarnation axiomatic in different and diversified schools' philosophy and religion in India except for the materialist (Charuvakas). This is a very profound philosophy. One can notice that Buddhists do not accept the existence of permanent self or soul and God and Vedantists uphold the existence of God, soul, or self, yet both with tremendously diverse views still accept that there is karma, birth, and rebirth. So, this idea is common to Indian thought. But the strange thing to notice is there is resistance to this idea in the west yet there is no logical argument in the history of western thought. But in Christian thought or Judaism, there is always the belief of some existence after the death of the body like the immortal soul which further goes to heaven or hell. If this is already accepted or even understand the claim that we do exist after death then this is just an extension of the law of karma and reincarnation. It is not difficult to understand if you believe in the existence of self or soul after death then there is the possibility of karma and rebirth is almost

inevitable.

4.2. 'Law of Karma' when properly understood is a way to human free will
The 'Law of Karma' is a philosophy of human free will but quite often Indians are charged with fatalistic kind of civilization, but if we take a deeper look at karma it is what we are today is what we have generated in the past but it's not fixed by some unknown force. That means, what we are experiencing today is what we created, as 'we reap what we sow', this is what mean by "what we will be in the future is in our hands today". So, there is always the modicum of free will, but karma can only generate and determines a broad outline of our lives but how we react to it depends more on the individual than karma which does not generate every little movement of our minds or thoughts or direction that life takes. So, we have freedom, wherever there are mind and intellect lit up by consciousness there is freedom. We have the power to make our destiny. This gives the message that, take the whole responsibility upon oneself and work out to your destiny. In the words of Swami Vivekananda on Karma "If what we think, we say and what we do that generates karma if our bad karma is there like tigers waiting to pounce on us, never fear because all the good that you have thought, felt and done is waiting with the power of a thousand angels to come to your help. This is the actual understanding

of the law of karma".^[15]

5. Conclusion

As a whole, it is a grand synthesis by Indian Ancient Philosophy on macrocosm and microcosm. It is the 'Consciousness' which also 'existence' and 'bliss' we find in ourselves as 'I' in the microcosm is the same reality of the macrocosm because when we investigated into macrocosm, we found the cycle of involution and evolution (the manifest and unmanifest) which means nature (Prakriti) is going through the cycles and beyond it all, there is the same 'existence', 'consciousness' and 'bliss'. This is stated in Vedanta by a great saying known as "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art), here 'That' means reality behind the macrocosm and 'Thou' means reality behind the microcosm which includes the physical body, sensory system, mind and intellect beyond all, the innermost is the 'Consciousness' (the Atman) is the same existence consciousness and bliss as a fundamental principle in the 'macrocosm' which is indicated by 'Art'. Therefore it is concluded by Indian ancients in wisdom, that the 'fundamental reality of the macrocosm is the same reality in the microcosm' which is a grand synthesis at which Vedanta arrives. This is to be understood philosophically and to be practiced spiritually for attaining permanent happiness.

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