

**CHAPTER IV**

**M O K S H A - THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE**

# I. THE CONCEPT OF MOKSHA

## 1. Introduction

And finally, **Moksha**, the fourth purushartha, needs clarification. As stated already, it is said to stand for the spiritual principle and is also said to be a state of bliss. It is supposed to mark the consummation of the process of our moral development and is therefore the ultimate goal of human life.

By way of clarifying the concept of moksha we propose to consider the following questions one by one:

- 1) What does the word moksha mean?
- 2) How did the concept of moksha originate?
- 3) What is the history of this concept?
- 4) Is the exclusive characterization of Indian philosophy as 'spiritual' justified?
- 5) Is Moksha the central concern of Indian philosophy?

## 2. The Concept

(i). **Etymology, Definition, Analogous words.** The common word 'moksha' comes from the Sanskrit root MUC- with the help of the formative -S. It means 'to set free, release, deliver, draw out of'.<sup>1</sup> Given this etymology, we may define moksha as the **state** of being liberated as well as the **process** of becoming free.

Some of the analogous words used to mean moksha are **mukti, Nirvana, Turiya, Kaivalya, Apavarga, Nihisreyasa** etc. These are not completely identical terms. However, we stick to the term moksha primarily because in the description of purusharthas it alone occurs in classical as well as modern usage, and secondarily

because it is used in a generic sense to denote all that is common to its variety of usages.

(ii). **In the Vedas and Brahmanas.** The word moksha does not occur in any of the Vedas though the base (root) **MUC-** is part of the vocabulary of the first Veda where it means 'to release, to let go'. But it occurs in the **Brahmanas** and is frequent in classical language.

*The term is used in Hindu Scriptures to denote both the experience of partial liberation on the earth and the state of total liberation in the divine life.<sup>2</sup>*

### **3. The origin of the Concept.**

(a) **Fear of death.** How did we humans come to have the idea of **moksha** is an intriguing question, to begin with. Two hypotheses have been formulated. One is that the fear of death might have given rise to the concept of moksha. The other is that the unjust state of affairs might have formed the background for the concept of **moksha**.

One of the main fears of humans has been the fear of death. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that from the very beginning of history the humans tried either to avoid it or to overcome it. This concern with death and the thought of what happens thereafter has loomed large in all the ancient cultures. The Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, Hebrew and Indian are all samples of such cultures. This fact is attested by a variety of sources such as the Egyptian Pyramid texts, the Book of Genesis in the Bible, The Odyssey of Homer and the Vedas.<sup>3</sup>

**In Ancient India,** to take the last of these sources as an example, we find the vedic man tackling the problem of death and looking forward to a blessed life in

heaven.<sup>4</sup> What is the nature of this blessed life, if we ask, is clear enough. It was conceived to be the fulfillment of our needs and aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

In the light of this attestation, we are justified in drawing the following conclusion: The ancient man's fear of death and his way of tackling it might have given rise to the idea of **moksha**. And, of course, this concept of **moksha** got more and more refined down the centuries.

(b) **Injustice and Pessimism.** According to the second hypothesis, the concept of **moksha** might have originated depending on how the humans tackled the problem of injustice and pessimism. When we look at time or times what strikes us most is how absent justice seem to be. How the innocent still suffer, how the wicked prosper still and get very little jail sentences if any, and how little seems to have changed since Job (in the Bible) lamented this unjust state of affairs. Most religions seem to tackle this evident pessimism in either of the following two ways: Either they appeal to a dualism between this life and the next. Or, they put most of the divine action in the past. According to the second alternative, the golden age is over, we are now in **kaliyuga** (the age of moral degeneration).

The first alternative assures believers of 'eternal life' after death. Therefore this life is to be seen as a proving ground, a testing time. Thus it becomes a dualism between a time in heaven and a time on earth. The second alternative invites believers to look backward for divine action. Thus, most religions place salvation in the past. Also, most religions flee the present for either a more heavenly future or a more miraculous past.

What is the solution to this problem of dualism, it may be asked. The solution seems to lie in a **new sense of time** and in our realization of the **Oneness of All Reality**. That is, the solution might be to deny this dualism of heaven and earth and to

trust that **Now** is the bringing together of the best of the past and of the future. This, however, is an area we cannot afford to go into, given the scope of our thesis.

#### 4. The Development of the Concept.

How the concept of **moksha** developed in course of time is our next concern.

(i). **Rta**. As we have said, the ideal aimed at, especially, in the **Rgveda** and the **Brahmanas**, was length of days on earth and life in the world of heaven in companionship with the gods. Also, it will be of help for us to recall here the idea of **Rta** we mentioned while dealing with the concept of **dharma**. The vedic man understood **Rta** as the cause of integration both personal and social and therefore as the cause of order in the universe.<sup>6</sup>

**Man's hope, insight and outlook**. His hope of lasting life and his insight into the cosmic order are rendered all the more rich by his positive outlook on life and on all that life could give.<sup>7</sup> These three aspects together - his hope, insight and outlook - enable us to affirm that the Vedas (1500 - 900 B. C. E.) perceived life in its totality and interdependence. That is, the vedas regard man and cosmos as a dynamic unity.<sup>8</sup>

(ii). **In the Upanishads**. But when we pass from the Vedas to the Upanishads we find a definite change of view. Why and how did this change occur? Though this question is worth examining, it does not serve our present purpose. Therefore, we only say what that change was. The change of view was from the objective to the subjective, "from brooding on the wonder of the outside world to the meditation on the significance of the self."<sup>9</sup>

How are unity and **Brahman** and **Moksha** related? During his inward journey, the Upanishadic man's perception of reality got transformed.<sup>10</sup> All multiplicity gets dissolved in the unity of **Brahman**. The dissolution of one's ego in

the great ocean of being called **Brahman** became the final goal. And it is this goal that is sought after and experienced as **moksha**. In other words, it is by becoming part of the ultimate unity of **Brahman** through knowledge that we attain the state of **moksha**.

Though the Upanishadic man lived in a world of rich multiplicity he began to ask the penetrating question: "What is that which being known, everything else becomes known?."11 This search resulted in the perception of unity, a unity that became sacred and holy, divine and normative. This explains why it is identified with **Brahman**. This concept is not a concept like truth, goodness, etc. It is not even a concept; rather it **the limit of a concept**.12 It is this experience of the unity of **Brahman** that is expressed in the **Mahavakyas** like '**tat tvam asi**'.13

As a result of this shift of interest, intuitive knowledge became the main concern.14 '**Aham Brahmasmi**', 'I am Brahman' is this special kind of knowledge. This also tells us what the upanishadic conception of **moksha** is. **Moksha** consists in the removal of 'all fetters' which is **avidya**15 and in the consequent awakening of the spirit to the true self which is non-different from **brahman**, the Absolute.16 So basically the upanishads propose a way of **jnana** (gnosis) which helps us attain moksha, and consider all other values as relative to it.17

How do knowledge and reality converge? The merging of our self with the ultimate self is illustrated by the following examples. i) It is like the rivers flowing into sea and disappear in it, giving up their names and forms;18 and it is not like water rain down on the mountain flowing at random down the downward slopes.19 ii) Rather, it is like a lump of salt getting dissolved in the water in such a way that we cannot take it again out of it.20

(iii). According to the **Mahabharata** also, **jnana** seems to be the only way to attain emancipation (**moksha**); knowledge alone is capable of cleansing us of all our

sins.<sup>21</sup> Even the Samnyasa way of life which renounces everything is of little avail to attain moksha.

(iv). **The Gita concept of Moksha** Before we begin the discussion of the problems of **moksha** in the various schools, let us look at the concept presented by one of the texts regarded as sacred - the **Bhagavad Gita**. While Buddha proposed an eight fold path, the **Bhagavad Gita** (c. 400 B. C. E.) shows us a three fold path which consists of **Jnana** (the vision of reality), **Bhakti** (total surrender to the Lord), and **karma** (action for the transformation of the world). These three paths converge and become a way of life as we reach a state where without clinging to the fruits of action we surrender all to the Lord.<sup>22</sup>

We are ruled either by **ahamkara** (egoism) or by **atmabodha** (self awareness). **Ahamkara** is caused by **kama** which is the cause of sin and the arch enemy of man.<sup>23</sup> This being the case, **Gita** understands **moksha** as freedom from **kama**. When freed from **kama**, **moksha** becomes **atmabodha**. That is, we begin to see our self in the divine self and to rejoice in it. When we are free from **kama** and are united with the Self, we begin to look at ourselves and the world from a divine point of view. That is, we see "all things in the Self, and the Self in all things".<sup>24</sup>

How do we explain this world-affirming attitude of the **Gita**? One explanation is that it is a reaction to the world-negating attitude of the samkhya system. According to samkhya, **moksha** would mean the emancipation of the spirit from the grips of matter (**prakriti**). If so, the right thing to do, according to samkhya preacher, is to refrain from secular involvement; and, instead, to retire into the solitude of forests for ascetical practices and meditative aloofness.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Krishna does not allow Arjuna to run away from the crisis situation but rather asks him to 'stand up and fight' in the 'battlefield of dharma'.<sup>26</sup>

(v). Without elaborating on the **Gita** stand, let us now look at the various schools meaning styles of thought. Depending on whether one draws inspiration from the Upanishads (which is supposed to be a continuation of Vedas) or not, there arose different schools of thought which are usually classified into orthodox and unorthodox. Here we take two examples only - one from each - of how **moksha** has been understood.

(a). **In Advaita**. One of the best articulations of the Upanishadic concept of **moksha** is to be found in the Vedanta, one of the orthodox schools. Even here we limit ourselves to the advaita Vedanta of Sankara. What follows is a brief summary of it.

"Brahma satyam jagan mittya, Jivo Brahmaiva na'parah." This is the central teaching of Sankara. That is to say: '**Brahman** is real, the world is illusory, the self is not different from **Brahman**.' If **Jiva** is essentially **Brahman** itself, then how to explain its supposed distinction? **Avidya** is what creates this impression of distinction. But this **avidya** can be got rid of through the right kind of knowledge.

It is important to remember that, according to this school of thought, the identity of the self is not something to be newly attained; rather, it is something that is already there which has only to be realized in our experience. Therefore **moksha** does not mean any actual change in the nature of the self, but it means a change in standpoint. In other words, **moksha** is not merely knowing **brahman**, rather, it is **being brahman**. This **being brahman** is **moksha** in its positive sense.

In its negative sense, **moksha** means **moksha from** bondage. As said above, this bondage is destroyed only by destroying **avidya** because of which we are bound. And this **moksha** from bondage is to be attained through knowledge; no other path there is. For, knowledge, unlike action, at once removes all **avidya** and consequently all bondage. Once this knowledge dawns it dawns for ever.

What are the liberated souls supposed to do, it may be asked. They are said to enjoy the four-fold bliss: They are: i) **Salokhya** (residence in the same place with God); ii) **Samipya** (Nearness to God); iii) **Sarupya** (having the external form like that of God); and iv) **Sayujya** (entering into the body of God and partially sharing his bliss).

Of course, before reaching this final means to **moksha**, the person wanting **moksha** has to fulfil a number of qualifications. The Vedantins in general admit this and they suggest a whole scheme of discipline, divided into **karma-yoga** and **jnana-yoga**, which is not immediately relevant for our discussion and so we pass on.

(b). **In Buddhism.** The second example of the concept of **moksha** is taken from Buddhism, one of the unorthodox systems. This is not the occasion for us to go into questions such as: What is the basis for classifying Buddhism as 'unorthodox' and why is it that buddhism could not strike permanent roots in Hindu India, etc. We only present the Buddhist understanding of **moksha**. '**sarvam dukha**,' discovered Buddha. Suffering is the basic fact of life. Desire (**trshna**) is what causes this suffering. For, it gives birth to attachment (**upadana**), greed (**kama**), anger (**krodha**), delusion (**moha**), lust (**mada**), aggressivity (**matsarya**) and so on. This is the way desire ties down human life to the cyclic process of birth and death (**samsara**).<sup>27</sup>

According to this Buddhist world view, **Moksha** consists in overcoming the causes of suffering and ultimately in freeing oneself from the process of rebirth. How to do it? This is to be done through meditative introspection and by following the eightfold path (**marga**) of ethics.<sup>28</sup>

Thus finally we reach **nirvana**, the word for **moksha** in Buddhism. The meaning of **nirvana** is a matter of dispute and is connected with '**anatmavada**'. Without getting involved in this dispute, we may take the usual understanding of

**nirvana** as meaning 'extinction of the self'. It is the definitive 'blowing out' of the fire of desire and the 'total extinction' of the cause of suffering.

## 5. Moksha - The Ideal State of Knowledge?

What is the true nature of **Moksha**? As we have seen, **Moksha** literally means freedom. This freedom is either freedom **from** (suffering, birth, etc) or freedom **to**. Therefore the concept of **moksha** is dual in nature, though in the usual descriptions of **moksha**, the freedom to is not emphasized as much as the freedom from is emphasized.

Also, depending on the variety of schools of thought, there are several theories regarding the **nature** of **moksha**. Accordingly, **Moksha** is described as the positive state of absolute bliss, the state of absolute absence of pain, the state of neither pleasure nor pain, communion with God or the company of God, the realization of the true nature of the self, an experience obtainable even in our embodied state, obtainable only after our physical death, etc. We are not in a position to discuss all these theories in detail. We can only touch upon some of them as we go along. Right now, we may point out one common factor that emerges from these descriptions: **Moksha** is an ontological state. If so, it is a **descriptive** concept and not a normative one (evaluative) like justice. The implications of such an understanding of **moksha** we shall take up later.

One of the impressions that we get from the foregoing account is that **moksha** represents an ideal state of knowledge. This is also the position that many of the authors like Karl H. Potter have taken. At the same time there are authors like Daya Krishna who have argued that **moksha** does not represent an ideal state of knowledge.

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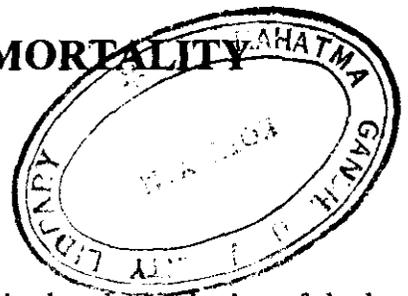
Therefore we cannot but examine the question of whether **moksha** really represent an ideal state of knowledge. What follows is a point that Prof. Daya Krishna has made.

In most schools of Indian philosophy, the state moksha is conceived of in such a way that either there is no object left to be known, or if any object is allowed at all, no relationship of any kind, is permitted. In Advaita Vedanta, the very awareness of something as an object - is a sign that one is still in ignorance and that moksha has not been achieved. In samkhya, though the ontological reality of prakriti is accepted, purusha in its state of Kaivalya cannot be aware of it as it is dissociated from Buddhi which alone permits viveka, i.e., distinction between prakriti and purusha. As for nyaya-vaisheshika, the soul is supposed to be unconscious in its state of liberation, and hence the question of knowledge cannot even rise in that state.

In **nirvana**, according to the Buddhists, the flame is extinguished and what remains can hardly be regarded either as knowledge or its fulfilment in the usual sense of these words. Jainism, of course, has the notion of **sarvajna**, the all-knowing person, in the state of liberation. This is the only view that supports Potter's position that **moksha** represents an ideal state of cognitive attainment. But one swallow does not a summer make.

## II. THE QUESTION OF IMMORTALITY

### 1. The Problem



We have not considered all the questions we raised at the beginning of the last section. We have only taken a cursive look at the concept of **Moksha**. Some of the problems the concept of **moksha** gives rise to and remains to be discussed are: 1)

What is the nature of the human soul? Is it logically possible for the human soul (consciousness) to continue to exist in the absence of a body? 2) How to explain man's belief in immortality? 3) Can we characterize Indian philosophy as 'spiritual'? 4) What has Indian philosophy to do with **moksha**? Are they integral to each other?

Given the complexities implied in these questions and the scope of our thesis, we can only afford to touch upon them, and that too, only on a few of them. First the question of immortality.

## 2. The Distinction between Soul and Body

If we die, shall we cease to live? The widespread belief in the immortality of soul and therefore the belief in **moksha** are problematic for the philosopher. Can the soul, consciousness, continue to exist in the absence of a body? Is it logically possible?

In the Rig Veda we find the idea of the soul separate from the body.<sup>29</sup> This separate soul can travel around.<sup>30</sup> The problem of immortality presupposes individuality which is denied in Indian Philosophy. All attempts to show that it is logically possible have failed miserably. For, even if we are authorized to distinguish between soul and body, we have no reason to say that one of them (soul) does exist independently. To illustrate this point: eyesight does not exist independently of the eye, though we can distinguish between them. To put it in Kantian terms, the fact that we can separate the soul **in idea** from the body does not prove that it is **really** separate.

### 3. Does moksha Exist?

If the immortality of soul is not beyond doubt, the existence of **moksha** cannot logically be proved either. Where does the strength of the case for immortality and **moksha** lie then? Does it lie in ethical considerations? Can we say that immortality and therefore **moksha** is an ethical postulate without which our moral experience becomes unintelligible?

Not all will say yes. 'Belief in immortality is very much a matter of feeling', says Prof. William James. That is to say, desire for **moksha** (immortality) is not sufficient to explain it, even though the feeling makes the belief lively. This implies that the truth of this ethical postulate is still on the feeling level, no matter how strong and age old the feeling might be. How then shall we explain immortality?

**Moksha, an Ethical Postulate?** In so far as there is no logical necessity for an after life, the only way out, in order to explain man's belief in immortality, is to postulate it. Many thinkers have done it, e.g. Kant and Plato, on two grounds. One, we do not see that happiness is always achieved proportionate to moral behavior in **this** life; two, we can understand the possibility of achieving complete moral perfection only in an infinite series of closer and closer approximations.

In other words, the soul is capable of the supreme good. But the ethical demand that the ideal be realized in man postulates an *infinite (meaning immortal)* regress in time.

### 4. An Ethical postulate.

(i). There is some truth in this in the sense that we feel it to be inconsistent that our soul which is steadily striving towards the ideal, should be annihilated in the midst of its progress and the elements of value in it lost.

Here we are not saying that mere duration is the essence of immortality. In fact, it cannot be because time is a form for the phenomenal world, and does not apply to the real world at all. Most of the ethical arguments that people advance look like an inference from **what ought to be the case to what is the case**. But this is as invalid as its counter-argument from **what is to what ought to be the case**.

The problem of **moksha** arises because what is ontologically required to be the case is not existentially such - a situation which is radically different from others where what 'ought to be' does not happen to be so as a 'matter of fact'.

The paradox regarding one's own self lies in the awareness that though ontologically one is what one ought to be - and it cannot be otherwise - one does not feel it to be so.

(ii). **Moksha - a Matter of Faith**. If there is no logical necessity for a person to have a completely disembodied existence, then might he live in another body? Let us take the case of a widow. Wanting to be united with her dead husband, she imagines him as very much as he was before he died. But would he have the body of a man of a certain age, say the age at which he died and remain for ever at this age?

Most people have not made at all clear to themselves what kind of immortality they have in mind, even when they fix all their hopes on the truth of this hypothesis. Yet the belief in immortality has been central to most religions. And the idea itself remains a matter of faith rather than of reason.

## 5. The Indian View

But, we the Indians look at it differently . **What about our individuality** if unity is the ultimate reality? The Upanishadic insight is that the ultimate reality is

non-dual. If so, individuality would not be the ultimate truth about ourselves. We have to shed our individuality and all that belongs to it so that the ocean of reality can overwhelm us. It is 'like a drop of water merging in the sea and losing its dropness and becoming the ocean itself'. This way of thinking seems to be one of the meanings of the famous saying of Jesus of Nazareth: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life will preserve it?".<sup>31</sup> **Moksha** is a concept that can be said to belong to practical philosophy (named by Kant as 'practical Reason'). **Moksha**, therefore, designates an ideal to be actualized. **Moksha** is an ideal unlike some other ideals pertaining to things outside the self. **Moksha** is supposed to be the realization of the true nature of the self itself even if it be the case, as in Buddhism, that there is no true nature either of the self or of anything else.

What do we mean by freedom (**moksha**)? When Indians speak of **moksha** as freedom what they mean is not the freedom involved in moral action, but the freedom of enjoying a state of being or the freedom of just being. **Moksha**, therefore, is more talked about in the context of knowledge of what truth is. Here knowledge is the knowledge of the self; and the knowledge of the self here coincides with its own reality.

If so, **moksha** does not belong to the domain of moral action, **dharma**. **Moksha**, in other words, is not **dharma** even if the latter may prepare the way for it.

*The central problem for the Indian philosophical reflection, therefore, has been that of error and not of evil as has been the case in the western tradition. And depending on the way one conceives the true nature of the self to be, one also conceives of what the realization of moksha would consist of. But the acceptance of such an ideal would not necessarily make Indian philosophy spiritual, just as the acceptance of any other ideal, even with respect to the self, would not make any philosophy spiritual or non-spiritual.*<sup>32</sup>

### III. MOKSHA AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

#### 1. Are they Integrally Related?

If moksha is a matter of faith, then the question of its relationship with Indian philosophy demands urgent treatment. How are they related? Is their interrelationship integral? That is to say, does the one become unintelligible without the other?

A meaningful treatment of this question presupposes a number of other questions such as 1) How shall we characterize Indian Philosophy - is it spiritual? 2) What does philosophical activity consist in? 3) Will the presence or absence of faith in God make the philosophical school one belongs to 'spiritual'? More related questions are expected to emerge as we go along.

#### 2. Positions Vary

(i). **The Common Belief.** One of the universally accepted ideas regarding the relationship between **Moksha** and Indian philosophy is that Indian philosophy is spiritual and that **moksha** is its main concern. This seems to be the thinking of most of the writers on Indian philosophy. The position is not that **moksha** is **one** of its main concerns. Rather, it is that it is **the** focal concern. Therefore two conclusions are often deduced from this: i). This is what makes Indian philosophy unique. ii). Without **moksha**, Indian philosophy would not make complete sense.

This claim is supposed to be evident to all and therefore no proof seems to be required. And so, the contention that Indian philosophy is spiritual and that **moksha**

is its central concern is never put to the test. Yet, if this contention is tenable, how are all the varied problems that Indian philosophy has dealt with in its past related to its supposed single central concern of *moksha*? Many do not see this as a problem at all.

There are nevertheless some scholars who have taken this problem seriously. Two such eminent scholars are Prof. Karl H. Potter and K. C. Bhattacharyya. They have taken seriously the problem of finding the relation between the various speculative concerns of Indian philosophy and **moksha** its proclaimed concern.

(ii). **According to Potter**,<sup>33</sup> Indian philosophy is inalienably related to **moksha**. His explanation is this: Difficulties such as skepticism and fatalism that obstruct a person from pursuing **moksha** give rise to philosophy in India. For these difficulties are intellectual in character and are therefore to be removed by means of intellectual activities such as reflection and argumentation. This would reconcile the apparent incongruity between the actual concerns of Indian philosophy which are essentially speculative and conceptual and its supposedly real concern with **moksha** which is essentially non-speculative and non-conceptual in nature. In other words, Indian philosophy is the removal of these intellectual difficulties that obstruct our way to **moksha**.

(iii). **According to K. C. Bhattacharyya**<sup>34</sup> also, Indian philosophy is integrally related to **moksha**, but for a different reason. In his view, the very awareness of **moksha** is contingent on philosophical reflection. His conception as embedded in his writings is this: Philosophic reflection alone makes us aware of **moksha**. And this ideal of **moksha** is actualized through a process of practical application traditionally known in India as **sadhana** or **Yoga**. Thus, philosophical and spiritual disciplines are intimately related to each other.

(iv). **An exception.** There are, however, very few exceptional scholars who argue that the above contentions are unfounded. Prof. Daya Krishna is one of them.<sup>35</sup>

He questions the characterization of Indian philosophy as 'spiritual' and the integral relationship between Indian Philosophy and **Moksha**. His conception of Indian philosophy is this: Indian Philosophy is philosophy proper like any other philosophy and it has very little to do with **moksha**. What about its alleged association with **moksha** then? It is the result of our uncritical acceptance of what has been handed down to us by authors.

### 3. Critical Remarks

Some of the observations we have already made concerning **moksha** confirms Prof. Daya Krishna's position that Indian philosophy has little to do with **moksha**. Facts we already pointed out are: i) There is no clear reference to **moksha** in the Vedas. (the same is true of **karma** too). Even in the Upanishads the concept of **moksha** is not central. For the primary object of the upanishadic teaching is **Brahmavidya**, and not **moksha**. ii) **Moksha** is a matter of faith. iii) Immortality is not proved.

Therefore both Potter and Bhattacharya are proved false by the fact first, that first only three **purusharthas** were accepted. **Moksha** came to be added later under the influence of the **sramana** tradition. This is proved by many a text such as the **Mahabharata**.<sup>36</sup> Second, there was always a tension between **dharma** and **moksha**. The heart of **dharma** was obligation to others, while **moksha** was always treated as the transcendence of all obligations whatsoever. The realm of **dharma** was the realm of **dvandva** (duality), while the realm of **moksha** was **dvandvatita** (beyond all duality). Third, moksha, in most Indian systems, is either a denial or a transcendence of the world. It is linked with the fourth **asrama**, i.e., **samnyasa** in which one is supposed to be **ritually** dead to the obligations of society i.e., the world.

These facts, however, do not sufficiently explain the fact that our belief in **moksha** is very ancient existing years before the christian era. How shall we explain this? Many explain it by saying that **moksha** is a pre-Aryan concept found in **Sramana** culture and later got assimilated in the Upanishads.

Here a word about **Sramana** culture is in order. Its origins go back to prehistoric times. Its origins are to be sought in the fertile valley of the Ganga where there thrived in the past, even before the advent of the Aryans with their priestly religion, a society of recluses who practiced a strict code of conduct and austere penances as a means of attaining the religious **summum bonum**. This culture might have later merged into the general stream of Indian thought.

With the growth of Brahmanism the practices and preachings of these recluses were often antagonistic to those of the priestly Vedic religion. These two categories of religious leaders, **sramanas and brahmanas**, are mentioned in Asoka's Pillar Edict VII where it is said that the people who do good deeds will be made to progress in courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas. They are frequently referred to in early Jaina and Buddhist works; and Patanjali mentions the natural conflict between their interests. We know the names of a number of sramana teachers such as Makkhali Gosala, Purana Kassapa, and others who lived in the sixth century B. C. E.; and at least two of them, Mahavira and Buddha, have won recognition in the religious history of India as leaders of faiths living to this day. In all likelihood even Kapila, of Samkhya fame, showed positive sramanic tendencies in his doctrines.<sup>37</sup>

Given these observations, we may be justified in saying that the relationship between **moksha** and the Indian philosophy is not integral in the sense that the one is not intelligible without the other. This, of course, does not mean that they are not closely related. They are closely related in the sense that Indian philosophy in course of time has helped clarify the concept of **moksha**.

## 4. Not Spiritual Either

Is what is meant by 'spiritual' and what is meant by 'moksha' really different? We cannot answer this, without clarifying the terms 'Moksha' and 'spiritual'. Since we have already explained the concept of **Moksha** in a previous section, here only an explanation of 'spiritual' is called for.

After all, what exactly do we mean when we characterize a philosophical tradition as 'spiritual'? In its ontological sense, the term 'spiritual' means that the nature of ultimate reality is not different from that of our mind or spirit. It asserts in other words, the primacy of consciousness as opposed to what is known as matter. So it (idea) implies that the spirit alone is real, and what appears as matter is only an appearance. Here it is of utmost importance that we take note of the words 'alone' and 'only'. For, without them, we cannot characterize Indian Philosophy as 'spiritual', in the ontological context.

In fact, the characterization of Indian Philosophy as 'spiritual' and the contention that it is integrally related to **moksha** are usually taken to be identical rather than in a sequential manner by most writers on Indian philosophy. This would be true only if there is concomitant variation between the two. But there need be no such variation. In fact, the two may vary independently of each other, says Prof. Daya Krishna. If so, one may hold the one without holding the other. To quote Prof. Daya Krishna:

*A philosophy is usually characterized as 'spiritual' or 'non-spiritual' because of the way it conceives of the nature of 'reality' and not because of the manner in which it conceives of the ultimate or highest ideal for man. It is its answer to the question about the reality of matter that determines whether a philosophy is to be considered as 'spiritual' or not, and not its answer to the question about the supreme end which human beings ought to pursue.*

*Thus a philosophy would not be entitled to be called 'spiritual' if it posits as the highest or ultimate goal for man the freeing of himself or itself from the bondage of matter... Rather, it would be worthy of that characterization if, and only if, it denies the reality of matter, and argues for the ultimate reality of only consciousness ....*

*But, except for Vijnanavada Buddhism hardly any school of Indian philosophy has denied the independent reality of matter in the ontological sense.<sup>38</sup>*

(ii). Let us clarify this a little more by putting it in another way: Would the acceptance of God by a philosopher in his system make us characterize his philosophy as 'spiritual' in nature? If it were the case,

*there is little doubt the Indian philosophical tradition would not be that spiritual. In fact, if one were to study the role that God plays in the philosophical tradition, one would find that this role in the Indian intellectual traditions in the field of philosophy is far more marginal than in their western counterparts.<sup>39</sup>*

*At the ontological level, then, the characterization of any philosophical tradition as distinctly 'spiritual' would lie not in its acceptance or denial of God or of its acceptance of the independent reality of 'consciousness' but in its denial of the independent reality of what is usually understood by the term 'matter' in common parlance.<sup>40</sup>*

If so, we can hardly characterize Indian philosophy as spiritual. For, most of the schools of Indian philosophy - the Jainas, Vaisesikas, the Samkhyans, the Charvakas, the Naiyayikas, The Buddhists, the Mimamsakas, the Vedantins and the followers of the so called Yoga school of philosophy - recognize the ultimate reality not only of the spirit in some form or other but also of matter in some form or other.

Since this acceptance of the ontic reality of matter among the various schools is almost universal, the characterization of Indian philosophy as 'spiritual' is totally untenable.

There is, however, another context in which Indian philosophy may be regarded as 'spiritual'. That context is that of Ethics. It is indeed certain that Indian thought has held spiritual salvation as the highest goal. But this, let us remember, is a generalized feature of traditional Indian culture in general. Philosophy, as it were, only accepts this goal and articulates it in a clearer manner.

## 5. Philosophical Activity

(iii). What does philosophical activity consist in? It consists in giving arguments (**paksha**) and counter-arguments (**pratipaksha**). And this is what philosophers in India did all the time.

Philosophers in India were interested more in argumentation than in **moksha**. This is the impression the texts give. But to the extent they were interested in **moksha** as a **purushartha**, they practiced the usual available time - honored yogic and other practices.

## 6. Potter Refuted

Is moksha integrally related to each one of the schools of Indian Philosophy? If yes, then moksha itself would have to be conceived in a pluralistic manner or only **one** of them (no matter which) would be truly related to moksha, and the rest spuriously. The Mimamsa, for example, does not even ritually proclaim itself as concerned with moksha.

*Many schools of philosophy have literally nothing to do with moksha. Nyaya, Vaisesika, and Mimamsa would predominantly come within this group.<sup>41</sup>*

If Indian philosophy is integrally related to moksha, we will have to show that the differences between the various schools of Indian philosophy center around their differing conceptions of moksha. But no one has yet made such an attempt, let alone shown by any one. Rather, all philosophical schools accept the generalized method of attaining moksha. This method is what in the Indian tradition has come to be known as Yoga.

But if this is the situation, how can **differences** between philosophical schools be accounted for on this basis? ultimately, it is the arguments for the differences that define the separate identity of each system.

Potter's position is based on a number of highly questionable assumptions. They are: i) Intellectual difficulties arise in such a way that it blocks our way to moksha. But the removal of such a block - philosophy - is not really useful since looked at from the point of view of moksha it would be a waste of time.

So this view of Potter view assumes that intellectual difficulties are like illnesses which hinder us from pursuing what we really ought to pursue, and philosophy is the presumed proper therapeutic discipline which helps in their removal and cure.

( ii) Are intellectual difficulties inevitable because of the rational nature of man and therefore its removal a necessary condition for our journey to moksha? If it were, it would make Potter's conception of Indian philosophy central to the whole enterprise of spiritual liberation.

Even if we grant this, such a conception would still suffer from extremely questionable presuppositions. a) Intellectual difficulties of a purely rational and cognitive type can stand in the way of the practical ends which are non-cognitive,

non-intellectual and non-rational in nature. This however is not true. For, not even Zeno was deterred from walking because there have been difficulties with respect to the nature of motion. This is equally true of all other philosophical difficulties, whether they be about time, space, self, matter, plurality, change or anything else.

The doctrine of the unreality of the world should have stood in the way of the Indian philosopher's effective dealing with the world. But this is not so. The Indian philosophers are not visibly hindered by intellectual difficulties. On the contrary, they are thought to be persons who had already attained moksha. For example, Sankara and Ramanuja. In fact, most of these philosophers wrote their philosophical works **after** they have alleged to have attained moksha. If Potter's view were right, they should have no reason to engage in such activity *except perhaps* for the removal of doubts standing on the way of their disciples' pursuit.

There is another presupposition which is deeper than the one that intellectual difficulties can stand in the way of practical pursuit of a goal: That purely conceptual difficulties can be resolved or dissolved once and for all, so that there is no trouble on the path to practical action, at least from them, *thereafter*. This, every one knows, just does not happen to be the case. Such presuppositions and their examination are not central to our present thesis. And so we do not pursue them further.

## **7. Bhattacharya Refuted**

Bhattacharya's conception is also rejected by Daya Krishna for the following reasons.<sup>42</sup> If Bhattacharya were right, then Indian philosophy would have had a short career indeed. For, once the possibility of moksha has been grasped by the

philosophic reflection, there is nothing more for it to do; no need of repeating the process of philosophic reflection.

In fact, the ideal of moksha was achieved in India as early as the Upanishadic and Buddhist times, whereas, philosophic reflection has not stopped with it; it has continued till today. How to reconcile these two basic facts of Indian philosophic history is the main hurdle for Bhattacharya's conception of Indian philosophy. Philosophers certainly could not have gone on apprehending the same possibility and articulating it for ever and ever. Thus, philosophic reflection, based on Bhattacharya's conception becomes redundant.

Is philosophy irrelevant as far as the pursuit of moksha is concerned? Our spiritual tradition seems to say yes. Let us take the case of the Upanishads and assume that they apprehended through philosophic reflection the possibility of moksha. Is not any further philosophic reflection a hindrance to the realization of the possibility? The tradition seems to think so. Even if philosophic reflection is used, as in the case of Potter's conception, to remove doubts regarding the already apprehended possibility, the tradition seems to reject such reflection on the ground that such doubts are unending and multifarious. Instead, the tradition tends to inculcate faith which is non-intellectual. Yet, in spite of all this, Indian philosophy continued to flourish and grow. How to reconcile this basic fact is a real challenge to any one who tries to link Indian philosophy with moksha.

## **8. Can We Conceive Moksha in Dynamic Terms?**

Suppose we meet this challenge by conceiving moksha in dynamic terms rather than in static terms? That is, we conceive of the possibility apprehended through philosophic reflection as essentially inexhaustible and infinite? Or, we proceed on the assumption that the experiential realization would not confirm the

theoretically apprehended possibility in every detail? In other words, moksha is thought of, like truth or goodness or beauty, as an ideal vaguely apprehended, but never completely realized.

True, this interpretation is interesting. But it is open to some basic objections.

i) Indian tradition, both spiritual and philosophical, does not conceive moksha as an ideal which is ever approached but never reached. It is perhaps the only ideal which the Indian tradition claims not only to be fully realizable in principle but also to have already been completely realized as a matter of fact, in the lives of many of our saints in the past as well as in the present. In fact, moksha is for the Indian the final and complete liberation from time which alone is the basis of the perpetual dynamism and discovery which we are trying to read into the concept. In short, the concept, moksha has not been conceived as progressive or evolutionary.

ii) A more important objection is: How to correlate the supposedly varying concepts of moksha with the different schools of philosophy? What, for example, are the Vaisesika, Nyaya or the Mimamsa concepts of Moksha? To say that philosophy is inalienably concerned with moksha implies that there are specific concepts of moksha which are integrally related to the particular philosophical positions of these schools. But no one has yet shown how this is so, while affirming the integral relationship between Indian Philosophy and moksha.

Because of these two objections, the dynamic concept of moksha is unacceptable.

The main problem with the position that Indian philosophy is concerned with moksha is this: There seems to be no way of making the multifarious other concerns of Indian philosophy intelligible in terms of this supposedly central perspective which alone is presumed to give it meaning.

This is a view that only a very few people like Daya Krishna has formulated and argued for so far. Yet it seems to meet all the difficulties which militate against the generally accepted view. Of course, it has difficulties of its own but they are not insurmountable.

## 9. Why then is the Claim made?

One such difficulty is this: How to account for the explicit claim made by all the schools of Indian philosophy that their philosophy is concerned with , and would lead to, moksha? How to explain the fact that practically all the authors -classical as well as modern - and almost every basic source book on the subject accept and repeat the claim seriously?

How is it that no one has asked the simple question as to whether we should take the author of the **Vaisesika Sutra** who asks us to believe that the knowledge of his various categories such as **dravya** (substance), **guna** (quality), **karma** (activity), **samanya** (generic qualities) etc would lead to moksha?<sup>43</sup> Should we believe the author of the **Nyaya Sutra** who tells us that a knowledge of the various **pramanas** (means of valid knowledge) and **hetvabhasas** (the logical fallacies) would lead us to moksha?<sup>44</sup> How are the controversies between the various schools of Buddhism supposed to lead to moksha?

Did anyone ever believe, including even the one who wrote, that these things could ever lead to moksha? It is not only unbelievable but also inconceivable that any one genuinely desirous of seeking moksha ever attempted the Nyaya or the Vaisesika way. If so, the question is: i) Why was this claim made at all? ii) Why has it continued to be made, when everyone knows that it was not relevant at all?

It is not too difficult to answer these, if we ask: Is it philosophy alone which makes this claim in India? Not at all. Practically every discipline makes this claim. Whether it be painting, poetry, music or dance, each is supposed to lead to moksha.<sup>45</sup> **Such is also** the claim with respect to the sciences of sex, economics, medicine, grammar, and politics.<sup>46</sup> This means that this claim is a generalized feature of every systematic study. If so, philosophy is not unique in making this claim. If so, it cannot be its specific essence either. For, example, let us quote from a straight book on sex and not from works on **Tantra** from which stronger statements could be quoted:

*In this insubstantial world of phenomena, substance belongs only to the happiness of feminine company of which the ecstasy has been held comparable to the supreme bliss of the highest self.*<sup>47</sup>

In this statement, sex is treated not as means to moksha, but as its equivalent. This supports our contention that in traditional Indian culture everything had to be related to moksha in order to get real respectability and attention.

If sex claims to lead to moksha as much as philosophy does, then obviously, the distinction between the two cannot be drawn in terms of moksha at all. Like **Brahma** (being) it may be the essence of everything but certainly it does not and cannot differentiate the one from the other.

Why then is the claim made at all? Most probably the answer lies in the fact that moksha was accepted as the highest value and the ultimate goal of life by the whole of Indian culture, and thus, anything, to be respectable and draw attention to itself, had to be related to moksha in some way or other. This claim, however, deceived only the historians of Indian philosophy and culture.

There is, however, another reason, according to Rajendra Prasad,<sup>48</sup> why moksha is considered the central concern of Indian Philosophy. It is the close

association between Indian Philosophy and religion. The main function of religion is to determine the ultimate end (or ends) of life and prescribe the method (or methods) of attaining it. This close association tempts us to infer that the heart of Indian Philosophy is its concern with the end of life ( moksha). And, since this religious end is always spiritual we jump to the conclusion that Indian Philosophy is also spiritual. A Natural corollary is the wrongly held common belief that Indian Philosophy must be subservient to the achievement of moksha. It is not only tempting, but the majority of writers on Indian Philosophy has succumbed to this temptation.

## 10. Conclusion

In short, philosophy has very little to do with moksha. There are many philosophers and schools of philosophy in India that have literally nothing to do with moksha. The Nyaya, The Vaisesika, and the Mimamsa are predominant in this group. And, even those who are partly concerned with moksha, are concerned with it primarily in a philosophical manner only. Of course, moksha like every other thing gives rise to philosophical problems and reflection on them would be philosophical in nature.

Moksha, then, is not the exclusive concern of Indian philosophy. Nor is it its predominant concern. Many of the thinkers and many of the schools are not concerned with it even marginally. Many others are concerned with it only in a peripheral manner. There are very few for whom it is a major concern, and even they are concerned with it only in a philosophical manner. The propagandistic statements by classical writers in the course of their works, along with the failure to note that moksha may give rise to genuinely philosophical problems as much as anything else, have created the myth that Indian philosophy is intrinsically and inalienably concerned with moksha, not with what may be called proper philosophical problems. It is time that the myth is dispelled, and Indian Philosophy is treated seriously as philosophy proper.

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