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## THE CONCEPT OF 'THE OTHER' IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract:** *The paper aims at bringing out a basic difference between religions which have propagated the idea of 'difference' which has resulted in the discourse on the concept of 'the other' and Indian philosophies such as the Vedic tradition and Buddhism which incorporated the idea of interdependence and acceptance eliminating the concept of 'the other'. Both these schools of thought pointed out unequivocally that the ultimate enlightened self is devoid of 'plurality' I.e. It is one which does not consider anything to be 'the other' - or considers every other to be a part of oneself.*

**Keywords:** Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Vedic tradition, Hinduism, 'the other', non - dual.

It seems that, in the same way as the modernists, we are trying to fill in post Nietzschean void by inventing our own images and grand narratives. Are there any grand narratives from other cultures that are capable of embracing difference? Yes, although the grand narratives of Christianity, Islam and Judaism have a difficult time dealing with differences there are two major traditions - Buddhism and Hinduism - that can and do embrace the differences in our increasingly pluralistic world.

Buddhism is democratic, cool, practical, and inexpensive and Buddhism is politically correct. Postmodern peoples and cultures live in a world of differences. Buddhism's philosophy of interdependence lets us see our differences as a vast interconnected web.

Another tradition capable of accommodating differences is the Vedic tradition of Indian Hinduism. Thousands of years ago the Vedic seers proclaimed that "Truth is one but the sages call it by different names." Thus Hindus tolerate a great variety of forms of worship and ways of attaining enlightenment. (Jim Powell, Postmodernism for beginners, Pp 156,157)

This paper aims at exploring the validity of the statements made above regarding the Indian philosophical analysis of morality in the context of recent developments regarding ethics in the west. After taking the theories propounded by Kant, Moore and Ayer seriously we have now started looking upon Ethics as space for the other. So Kant tried to establish how morality comes into existence in the

first place (a few, because others are too lazy and coward to take their own decisions constitute themselves as the guardians of humanity). According to Kant to act freely is to act morally. He believes that we as rational self-determining beings have purposes. To treat individuals as means to a goal is to treat them as things (without purposes of their own) He talks of condition of universality. We must, in locating ourselves as ends treat all others as ends. The highest good in the world is simply this Kingdom of ends in which the greatest welfare of individuals is guaranteed by their treatment as beings with purposes which must be respected. The concept of ethics continued to be debated in the twentieth century. G.E Moore presented his theory of 'intuitionism in Ethics'. According to Moore Ethics is mainly concerned with the predicate 'good' and 'bad'. The central question of ethics is what the predicate 'good' means or stands for. A.J. Ayer who was a 'Logical positivist' stated that there are just two kinds of significant propositions - tautologies and empirically verifiable assertions of facts. Positivists did not recognize 'intuition' as a respectable means of verification, and since no one was ready to maintain that moral judgments are either tautologies or verifiable by ordinary sense experience, it followed that they could not be significant propositions., i.e. they could not really be as their grammatical form might lead one to suppose, or indeed genuine assertions of any kind at all. Ayer proposed that moral judgments served to express the feelings of the speaker. According to this view it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments for they have no objective validity

whatsoever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. According to R.M Hare moral discourse is prescriptive and the essence of moral judgment is not influence but guidance. In the modern world Levinas redefines Ethics as 'consideration for the other'.

It is clear that logic has been at the centre of development of any theory in the west. Ethics, for them is a scientific Endeavour, for it seeks to observe, classify and explain moral phenomena. It aims at explaining moral judgments by showing their place in a system which cannot exist as a consistent whole without them. It is metaphysical in so far as it seeks to explain them by correlating them to an organic system of reality. Every logically unacceptable theory needed to be changed. While the Western world developed its own theory of ethics and changed it from time to time, when it failed to correlate to the empirical reality the Indian philosophers never developed a theory of ethics. This was perhaps because what is empirical reality for the western philosopher is unreal for the Indian philosopher. The Hindu and Buddhist philosophers consider empirical phenomenon to be unreal because they are constantly changing. Pradeep Gokhale, in his views on Ethics in Indian Philosophy points out that there exists no proof of the existence of any Indian Ethical theory. Some philosophers believe that the Indian ethical perspective is clearly reflected through the Geeta and Mahabharata, Poorvamimansa and religiology. Gokhale points out that Epics like Mahabharata or the texts like Geeta do not talk about 'ideal' action in the course of human life. In other words the Indian philosophical schools do not prescribe any behaviour as 'ethical'. The following are some striking features of the philosophical conclusions drawn by the ancient Indian philosophers.

1. The cosmic process is beginning less
2. Ramanuja insists that Karmas should be performed in an absolutely disinterested manner
3. There is an ultimate reality called 'Brahman'Brh - means to grow or to evolve — so reality is for ever growing or evolving - it is not fixed.  
This Brahman is described in two ways in the Upanishadas. It is called cosmic, all comprehensive, full of good qualities and it is also called acosmic, quality less, indeterminate and indescribable. (All Indian philosophy including Buddhism is rooted in Upanishadas)
4. There is a charvaka view which states that perception is the only means of valid knowledge.
5. The Jaina metaphysics is a realistic and relativistic pluralism. It is called *anekantavada* or the doctrine of meanness of reality - Reality is unity and difference or difference and unity

6. A thing is real, unreal and indescribable.
7. All judgments are relative and conditional and all truth is partial
8. Jainism refuses to rise higher than the relative. It has a bias against absolutism and in favour of common sense realistic pluralism
9. The Shunyavadins point out that Reality is indescribable and beyond all categories of intellect and that therefore it can be called neither shunya nor ashunya nor both nor neither. The point that reality is consciousness was developed by Vignyanavada.
10. Buddhism points at two extremes - it is possible to lead a life of pleasure devoted to desire and enjoyment -this is base, ignoble, unspirited, unworthy and unreal. The other is a life of self mortification; it is gloomy unworthy and unreal. There is a state of absolute reality which is indescribable.

It should be noted that the Buddhist philosopher or Vedantin does not try to validate his statements though it may not be impossible to do so. It will be worthwhile to note the views of the well known Indian philosopher Nagarjuna on logic. He condemns logic itself. According to him logic has only a negative value because it helps to validate the unreal. We only refute the theory of our opponent without however accepting the converse view. Our words are not policemen. They cannot arrest us. They simply enable us to express something. ... We accept the empirical reality of logic, but it is a reality which ultimately undermines itself. From the absolute point of view reality is silence.

An Indian philosopher therefore does not attempt to justify all that he says. He may at times elucidate. Nagarjuna for example upheld the view that morality will differ from person to person and Buddha did not preach the same things to all. In his 'Ratnavalli' Nagarjuna says that just as a learned grammarian may teach even the alphabet, similarly Buddha teaches according to the capacity of his disciples. To the ordinary people he taught affirmation so that they may avoid all evil deeds. To the mediocres he taught negation so that they may realise the unreality of the ego. Both these are based on duality. To the best he taught the blissful shunya, the deeper truth, terrible to the fools, but kind to the wise. Nagarjuna condemns nihilism (*nastikya*) by saying that negation leads to hell, affirmation leads to heaven and non-dual truth which transcends affirmation and negation leads to liberation. This pure knowledge where affirmation and negation, good and evil, heaven and hell are merged is called liberation by the wise. Buddhism also prescribes duties for children and parents, wife and husband friends to each other, Teacher and pupils, servants and workpeople's, subjects to

the king and king to his subjects. These duties ensure a constant consideration for 'the other' in every walk of life.

The Buddhist way of thinking takes into consideration the natural differences between men. It therefore prescribes different codes of conduct for people following different ways of life. For example for the laymen who wish to take upon themselves to observe the precepts the five precepts are - 1. To abstain from destroying 2. Not to take that which is not given 3. To abstain from misconduct in sexual matters 4. To abstain from false speech and 5. To abstain from liquor that causes intoxication and indolence. There are three additional precepts to be followed by laymen who are ready to practice temporary renunciation 6. To abstain from untimely meals 7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music, watching grotesque mime, from using garlands, perfumes, cosmetics and personal adornments 8. To abstain from high seats. There are ten precepts for those who were ready to remain unattached to their families either for long periods or lifelong 9. The seventh precept reemphasized and 10. To abstain from accepting gold and silver. Also, there was no rigidity regarding the practice of the precepts for according to Dhammapada -(Dh.v.142) Even though a person wears ornaments, if he conducts himself calmly, is constantly tranquil, leads a life of chastity and has laid aside sticks in his dealing with other living beings, he is a Brahmin, he is a bhikkhu.

The Buddhist concept of pure knowledge also makes a theory of Ethics a logical impossibility. As far as morality is concerned Buddhism believes that it is purely a personal affair. According to Dhammapada - Surely by oneself is evil done, by oneself one becomes pure. Purity and impurity are of the individual, no one purifies another. (Dh, v,165) The ultimate enlightened self according to both Buddhism and the Vedas is one that is devoid of 'plurality'. To put it in the modern context it is one which does not consider anything to be 'the other', — or considers the other to be a part of oneself. The pains and pleasures of all others are therefore experienced by the self. A comparison of this concept of the 'ultimate enlightened self' with the development of the concept of the other in the western thinking will not go amiss at this point. While the age of reason concentrated on the 'unique singularity' of truth — reality - self- ideas and the post modern world tried to establish plurality as the ultimate reality the concept of ethics has undergone changes accordingly. When Levinas advocates acceptance and recognition of 'the other' as the possible 'ethical consideration' he indirectly advocates a distance between one's own self and the other. "The Other" will in this sense always remain the other.

The Indian philosopher, who considers the ultimate reality to be non - dual, would wish for a realization like -1

am a part of the world and the world is a part of me and the two are inseparably linked. Any action undertaken by the self cannot be therefore without a consideration for 'the other'.

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