



Indian and Ancient Greek Societies, Ethics and Culture from Aristoteles to Brachmaputra

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism is not a term that arose nowadays but as it seems Ancient times have shown that the relations between cultures have had common and solid social and ethical foundations. Examining the correlation between the Indian and the Greek philosophy our research has concluded that as Swami had quoted the philosophy of Socrates and Plato is identical to the philosophy of the “rishis” of ancient India and as he also stated “the Divine manifests itself in many forms and God is worshiped through many forms and that offers people great joy and that worship was an important aspect to both cultures. Both cultures have stated the importance of the Divine but the faith in ethics as well, such as the principles of morality, right behavior and tolerance among its members as necessary conditions that can lead to a “healthy”, ethical society. There has also been a correlation between the values of the Truth, the God and the Beauty that are, in the Indian philosophy, named Satyam Shivam Sundaram.

Keywords: multiculturalism; Indian philosophy; Greek philosophy; rishis; Divine; Ethics; correlation.

1. The history of philosophy

The history of philosophy has its roots in the ancient times and is not limited to a philosophical current or a national intake but it mostly emphasizes in a correlation of ideas and ethics that are mostly common between peoples, nations and religions (White, 2008). Philosophical ideas are timeless and, although there appear to be differences amongst them, their basis is universal, meaning that they emphasize mostly in ideas that have an ontological base consisting in matters of the “Divine”, of ethical values and the meaning of life and existence (Sesanti, 2018).

Many philosophies have been born and spread in the ancient times, the Indian, the Greek, the Chinese, but the ancient Greek and Indian cultures are mostly concerned with ethics, the “Divine” and cosmogony (Sharma & Gautam, 2022). This ethical and dialectical relationship that has been seen between the two philosophical currents, refer to the relations that are born between people, their values and their relation to the “Divine”, leading to the conclusion that these philosophical currents are linked through universal human characteristic. And these characteristics may, in certain points, differ, based on the different development of each culture, but overall their ethical and social bases are the same (Rai, & Tiwary, 2021).

The foundations of the Indian philosophy, as will be shown above, highlight the possibility of internal connections with the ancient Greek way of thinking, ideas and values, with socio-political and ethical roots that are explained by the meeting of Indians and Greeks through the journeys ancient people made, from the Greek area to South Asia. These journeys have made it possible for the ideas to be transferred and become known to both nations and these local hegemonies prevailed in the region for two centuries, with a combination of the Greek and Indian languages as well as a meeting of the ancient Greek religion with those of Hinduism and Buddhism (Blomqvist, 2016).

These two elements, language and religion, that can mix in sync, are the ones that can set the basis for a meaningful comparison between traditions and cultures and can promote the connections that are apparent between the Greek and the Indian culture and way of thinking. A first point of ascertainment between the two is the official name of the Indian religion, “*Sanatana Dharma*”, that means “eternal truth”, which is inextricably linked to its philosophical tradition (Zavos, 2001). As far as the term “Hinduism” is concerned it is said to have a foreign designation, as it is quoted that the term’s etymology comes from the river “Indus” and it was used by the army of Alexander the Great in order to name the inhabitants that lived on the banks of the river “Indus”. All these show that the relation between the Indian and Greek philosophy has a more concrete basis that it was prevailed (Jahanbegloo, 2021).

1.1 Indian philosophy and Aristoteles

The religion of "*Sanatana Dharma*" has a complex meaning and it consists of multiple religious beliefs and moral imperatives, it is often described as a choice of path that defines existence, with elements that have a connection with the meaning of life and existence, but it also proposes a constant search for discipline. In the sense of ethics that are concerned, "*Sanatana Dharma*" has enough elements as to be considered a religion, that hides within six elements: the six "*Darshanas*", that are the sacred texts of the Vedas, the "*Upanishads*", the holy texts of Hinduism that explain the Vedas and teach the meaning of "*Brahman*", that is the absolute being, God. "*Brahman*" is the quintessence of the material phenomena but it cannot be perceived by the people's senses but it can be approached through self-knowledge, as it presents the universe's ultimate reality (Dwivedi, 2018; Shiva, 2021).

The Upanishads identify the "*Atman*" as a high principle and it refers to a person's self-awareness, as the inner essence of being is considered (Krishnan, 2023) that can be identified as an inner brahman, "*εαυτός*" as the Greeks used to say (Sidiropoulou, 1998). One of the basic ideas that arise to the Hindu tradition is one's self and the value of the thought, the power of the mind as the primary source of knowledge. This knowledge has to do not only with the individual, a person's needs, desires and the self-awareness but the world as a whole. The self-awareness presented a great meaning in the Greek philosophy with the quote "*γνωθι σαυτόν*" (Plato, Charmides, 164d), as the individual acts in order to achieve the awareness and does everything that is needed in order to become a whole person (Sharma, 1986).

An important conceptual addition, which comes to unify all of the above, is that the concept of "*Darhsan*" that represents the "viewing" of things, persons or sacred objects. Especially, in Indian philosophy "*Darhsan*" expresses the way that the Indian philosophy views all the things and understands them, it expresses the way people have an aspect of all their surroundings and in the Greek tradition this viewing of the "absolute truth" emerges from philosophy and highlights the fact that there is a connection between the Indian and the Greek philosophy (Savarkar, 2021).

The phrase "*absolute truth*" (Aristotle), arises from the philosophical basis that is often found in the Greek philosophical culture but there appears to be an crucial differences amongst the philosophical currents as far as the logic behind the reasoning is concerned (Long, 2010). In the Greek philosophy there is a disconnection of truth, correctness and validity in reasoning, while the opposite happens according to Hinduism, where a connection of truth and correctness is necessary in reasoning. In particular, the final product of reasoning is connected to its process and is focused in synthesizing the real generalities with real empirical examples, as an idea that was formulated by Aristotle, with his reason to consist of two or more true premises and a conclusion.

As far as the Indian reasoning, is concerned it consists of five stages that are premise, proof, rule, the application of the rule, and finally the conclusion and all of the above elements are always something that a person must perceive with co-ordinance with the empirical data. As far as the intertextual connections between the two philosophies are concerned there are essential similarities within the source of "existence" and it is a fact that almost all cultures emphasize in the creation of the world and the source and meaning of Both the Indian and the Greek culture prioritize the research to the basis of the "*existence*" and "*non-existence*", and the source of the world's "birth", the "*cosmogony*". This philosophical aspect consists on the basis that when the world was formed there was either "existence" or "non-existence" before the creation and from chaos the first essence has arisen, the first being, understood as "God", the "Divine" in general, in many cases represented as the concept of "Love". As far as the Indian cosmogony is concerned, in contrast to the ancient Greek texts, love is understood as a primal basis, a feeling created by the intellect therefore it had an immaterial form, which was transformed into the source of the preservation of life and creation. Therefore, love is the connecting link to both cultures, Greek and Indian, from which existence emerges (Smith, 1989).

1.2 Indian philosophy and Platonism

Besides the connection between the Indian philosophy and Aristotle there is another strong connection between the Indian philosophy and Platonism, with the most basic link between them to be the soul and the parts of the soul (Gerson, 2020). The philosopher Parmenides in particular links the Indian philosophy and Platonism, as his well-known poem (Parmenides, 54), presents an analogy to one's trip to knowledge as a chariot, whose rider tries to "transport" from oblivion to knowledge and that cause is the ultimate goal. "*Atman*" in Hinduism seeks the same absolute knowledge, which is described in the Upanishads and refers to a more spiritual, religious goal and this "trip" presents distinctions that are found from Parmenides and affinities that can be compared with Platonism. In the Indian philosophy "*Atman*" is the rider and his body is the chariot, intellect is the rein of the horse and the horse is bridled through thinking (Saraswathi, 2005). This analogy of the soul and the chariot is not only found in Parmenides but in Plato's work "*Phaedrus*" (Plato). Another element in association to that analogy that is found in the Indian philosophy that can be used in strengthening the argument concerning the link between the two cultures is the use of the word "horse", that refers not only to the means that can lead to the goal but also the sense of "travelling", the desire to do so that connects to the part of the soul that represents the "thymoid", the prime feelings and passions a human can experience (Plato). Furthermore, in Hinduism the words "*Atman*" and "*Brahman*" have an utmost importance in the Indian philosophy, with the term "*Atman*" referring to consciousness, the soul and one's True Self that differs from the egoistic feeling a person has. "*Brahman*" approaches the Idea of God and "*Atman*" is one of its parts. "*Atman*" and "*Brahman*" are eternal and unchanging ideas that are centered in spirituality, consciousness, knowledge of the truth and wisdom (Afroogh, Khajegir, & Fahim, 2020). The link with Platonism refers to Plato's formulation of the definition of the "soul" as an indestructible, immaterial and therefore immortal substance as an indicator of the morality and knowledge a person has (Sharma, 2018).

In comparing the Indian and the Ancient Greek philosophy one can come across affiliations amongst the Cynics, philosophers in ancient Greece and the “rishis” in Indian philosophy. A link can be found to their basic principles. In particular Cynics and rishis are both philosophers that teach, the Cynics have a philosophical “school” where they teach and the “rishis” have their students by their side. According to the subjects that are taught there is also a connection between the two philosophical currents, as the concepts of “speech” and “truth” are basic concepts in both cultures. The “rishis” create the “Vedas”, the religious texts of Hinduism while the Cynics teach the need of “self-sufficiency” (Gregorios, 2002).

1.3 Indian philosophy and Heraclitus

The philosophical ideas and the thought of the ancient Greeks has been the most intellect, lucid and has born seeds for other philosophies and the Indian philosophy has also been profoundly visionary, revelatory and powerful enough to open mankind’s horizons, it became intellectual but logical and the ancient Greek thinking has always been “clarified” with insight and “strength”. The ancient Greek philosophy has offered many representatives, like Socrates and Plato but one of the most direct and interesting Greek thinkers was also Heraclitus, who had a tendency towards rationality, but his style was different that the sophists as he was an “aphoristic”, “epigrammatic” and an “enigmatic” thinker. Heraclitus tries to find the meaning of the universe, its essence in what he calls “*ΠΥΡ "αείζωον"*: *Ἦν αἰὶ καὶ ἐστὶν καὶ ἔσται, τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός*”, with the meaning of an eternal fire that has been and always will be and the lightning that rules everything (Logothetou, 1908). That means that the essence of the universe can work as an analogy with the “Vedic fire”, that has created the world, dwells in men and things and at the same time contains all the gods. Furthermore, “*ΠΥΡ "αείζωον"*” has a clear affinity with the Vedic thunderbolt, the Fire of the Sun, the Eye. Also, Heraclitus’ phrase “Immortals mortals, mortals immortals” refers to the Vedic Rishi, who has invoked the Dawn as a “Goddess and mortal” (Smith, 1989).

Heraclitus also recognizes the interrelated unity between the eternal and the transitory, where the gods are constantly changing until the time comes when they perish, meaning that he identifies Death in the form of Hades, the god of Death, the presence of the Underworld and the wanderers of the night. The domination of Death can be found on the Indian philosophy, as the Upanishads contain the same truth as Heraclitus, that life is dominated of Death and the universe existed solely by Death (Lakhan, 2008). Another analogy that can be found In the Indian philosophy and Heraclitus is Heraclitus’ reference to the “dry or wet soul” as he doesn’t refer to the mind or the thought but the liquidity a soul experiences under the “ecstasy” and emotional excitement (Mansfeld, 2015). On the other hand the “dry soul” is the purified consciousness of the heart; the purified intellect (Betegh, 2007).

Heraclitus’ thinking has a logical basis, beginning of his perspective on existence and his continuous justification of that beginning. The problem of the “one and the many” has always been a primary question in Greek and Indian philosophy, in the basis of whether an individual human being has his own immortal existence or is it a result of transition in evolution, with Heraclitus arguing that that the “one and many” are real and coexist, given the terms “oneness” and “multiplicity”. He quotes that “*Ἡ Ὑλὴ εἶναι μία, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ τὰ άτομα, τὰ πλάσματα, τὰ σώματα. Ἡ Ἐνέργεια εἶναι μία, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν πολλές δυνάμεις. Ὀνομαζέσθαι εἶναι μία, ἀλλὰ οὐκ εἶναι πολλὰς.*”, translating to “The matter is one, but atoms, creatures, bodies are many. Energy is one, but there are many forces. The Mind is one, but souls are many.” Furthermore, the multiplicity returns, dissolves into the One from which it originally came from, therefore it has never completely disappeared (Vegetti, 2000).

The next question that presents a pararel between the two cultures is the essence of the eternal One, with the ancient Greeks to consider that the Cosmic Essence has consisted of 4 elements, that are the Fire, Air, Water and Earth), omitting the “Aether”, that for the Greeks was the symbol of infinity. First of all, Fire is the creative force of infinity; Air is the principle of life that brings Fire from heavens to earth. For Heraclitus, the idea of Fire represents the eternal burning, creative and destructive power, that processes in a continuous and ceaseless change. His thinking is based on the idea of the “One” becoming “Many” and the “Many” becoming the eternally “One”. He quotes that “*Τα πάντα ῥεῖ*”, everything in the existence is fluid and nothing can be the same, our existence is an eternity and a continuous transition, nothing lasts forever, no man or god. God, in his opinion has not created the universe, but the Eternal Fire that always existed has created it (Bingham, 1929). As long as Hinduism is concerned and particular in the Vedas “Fire” was the symbol of luminous divine energy, the principle of creation that burns within all beings, while in the Rig Veda the symbol of water is constantly mentioned, as it is quoted that “in the beginning was the Ocean”, meaning the formless chaos of unconscious beings, the eternal river of things (Sharma, 1952). The idea of a universe in constant motion and incessant change existed before, but Heraclitus saw behind and beyond it a mysterious principle of identity. He has demonstrated that every day, a new Sun rises, meaning that existence arises through continuous change, like everything in Nature, but it is the same Eternal Fire that rises every dawn in the shape of the Sun. In this universe the human being has an eternal, true existence, as well as a temporary and apparent one, a theory that refers to the immaterial “Purusha” of pure consciousness (Borde, 2021).

The Buddhists also claim that nothing in the world is the same forever, even in the most persistent continuum of forms and they conclude that there is no Essence of things, nothing is self-existent and the manifested being that is called “existence”, lies behind the eternal Nothingness and the absolute Void. Heraclitus, on the contrary, stated that, although the essence of the flame is always changing, the principle of Fire remains the same, producing the same energetic results while Buddhists, start from the ides of “Karma”, and arrive at the universal “Energy” as the creator of the world. Heraclitus saw that there is something in all the movement and differentiation that insists on constancy, that affirms the unity that triumphs in eternity, meaning that all beings are the same despite their differences, have the same origin, are governed by the same universal laws and are constantly searching for that quality that unites all beings and makes all things as “One” (Conze, 2013).

In conclusion, the differentiation of Heraclitus from early Greek philosophy and the similarity of his thought to Indian philosophy lie in his belief in the harmony of the opposites, as every force of action is followed by a force of reaction, and from the resistance between them all the harmonies of existence are created. He also likened the movement of life to the movement of the bow, where two countervailing forces are exerted bringing an energy of tension that limits the power of release, concluding that discord brings harmony and from discord comes the best rest and the most beautiful, the hidden harmony through the contradictions.

Conclusions

The history of philosophy is not limited to a philosophical current or a national intake, but on the contrary it is a fermentation of ideas between peoples and religions. Philosophical issues are timeless and universal, and emphasize in ontological issues of existence and essence. Both the ancient Greek and Indian cultures, two cultures that meet socially, are concerned with cosmogony, the Divine and ethics showing that philosophical ideas coexist worldwide, showing, for another time, that the things that unite the cultures are more than the ones that aparts them.

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