



Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Inter-disciplinary and
Trans-disciplinary Studies

BPYC- 101

Block IV

**INDIAN PHILOSOPHY:
SOME APPROACHES**

Block Introduction

The aim of this block is to present some of the philosophical approaches so that learners can understand the nature of philosophy. To achieve its aim this block divides into 3 units. Each unit presents some of the philosophical approaches and perspectives.

Unit 12 “Nāsadīya Sūkta and Lokāyata” acquaints the learners with the unique philosophical perspective of Indian Philosophy to explain the origin of universe; namely, Nāsadīya Sūkta. This unit also highlights and explains the philosophical positions of Lokāyata philosophical tradition(s).

Unit 13 “Buddhism and Jainism” explains the early Buddhism known as Pāli Buddhism or canonical Buddhism. Early Buddhism must be differentiated from the later schools, which grew long after the Buddha’s death. It also highlights the metaphysical thesis of Jainism, which is a very old heterodox system that repudiates the teachings of the *Vedas*.

Unit 14 “Philosophy of the Epics” is about the philosophy of *Mahākāvyas*. An attempt has been made to know the philosophical thoughts of *Ramāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Gīta*. The metaphysical, epistemological and ethical philosophies propounded by these *Mahākāvyas* have been discussed in this unit.

UNIT 12 NASADIYA SUKTA AND LOKĀYATA*

Structure

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Nāsadīya Sūkta

12.3 Indian Materialism

12.4 Let us sum up

12.5 Key Words

12.6 Further Readings and References

12.7 Answers to check your progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the unit are:

- The aim of this unit is to acquaint the learners with the unique philosophical perspective of Indian Philosophy to explain the origin of universe; namely, Nāsadīya Sūkta.
- To understand and explain the worldview of Indian Materialism in detail.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The term *Darshana* is translated as, ‘to see’ and when we talk about Indian Philosophy (*Bhartiya Darshana*), there can be various different perspectives to see and analyse the vast canvas of Indian Philosophy. For example, we usually divide the schools of Indian Philosophy on the basis of *Nāstika* and *Āstika Darshanas*, but it is also true that this is not the only framework in which we categorise Indian Philosophy. We choose a specific frame of reference which depends upon what we want to analyse and the categorisation may vary accordingly. This unit is an attempt to see two extreme perspectives in Indian Philosophy.

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One has its roots in the Vedic literature, and the other one is often referred to as anti-Vedic, but one characteristic which is said to be common in both of these writings is the sceptical approach to understand the world. The conclusion they arrive at is a completely different point of discussion, but the starting point in terms of a sceptical enquiry seems to be similar.

The Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge traditions of Indian Philosophy are known for raising and resolving various fundamental questions regarding the highest reality, the difference between real and unreal, the self, the relation between atman and Brahman, and the origin of the world in the form of debate and dialogue; in the form of questions and answers, and in the form of speculative enquiry as well. Nasadiya Sukta (Ṛgveda 10. 129) is one such example of speculative enquiry, which is known for its non-establishment and non-discursive thought. It is no less than a matter of wonder that this sukta does not attempt to establish a final theory of the creation of the world. We can ask what the aim of this sukta is if at the end it does not fulfil its purpose for which it is written. Along with it, this unit also discusses the theory of Materialism in Indian Philosophy. There is no other school in Indian Philosophy which gives primacy to matter over consciousness, and not only this, materialism establishes all of its theories on the basis of this fundamental claim that matter is the only reality. We will be discussing these two perspectives with their uniquely extreme nature of enquiry in this unit.

12.2 NĀSADIYA SŪKTA

“nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat | kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmann ambhaḥ kim āsīd gahanam gabhīram || 1 || Then even nothingness was not, nor existence, There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it. What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?

na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtam na tarhi na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ | ānīd avātam svadhayā tad ekam tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ kim canāsa || 2 || Then there was neither death nor immortality Nor was there then the torch of night and day. The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining. There was that One then, and there was no other.

tama āsīt tamasā gūlham agre 'praketaḥ m salilam sarvam ā idam | tucchyenābhv apihitam yad āsīt tapasas tan mahinājāyataikam || 3 || At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness. All this was only unilluminated water. That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing, arose at last, born of the power of heat.

kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt | sato bandhum asati nir avindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā || 4 || In the beginning desire descended on it. That was the primal seed, born of the mind. The sages who have searched their hearts with wisdom know that which is kin to that which is not.

tiraścīno vitato raśmir eṣām adhaḥ svid āsīd upari svid āsīt | retodhā āsan mahimāna āsan svadhā avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt || 5 || And they have stretched their cord across the void, and know what was above, and what below. Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces. Below was strength, and over it was impulse.

ko addhā veda ka iha pra vocat kuta ājātā kuta iyaṁ viṣṛṣṭiḥ | arvāg devā asya visarjanenāthā ko veda yata ābab || 6 || But, after all, who knows, and who can say Whence it all came, and how creation happened? The gods themselves are later than creation, so who knows truly whence it has arisen?

iyaṁ viṣṛṣṭir yata ābabhūva yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na | yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyoman so aṅga veda yadi vā na veda || 7 || Whence all creation had its origin, he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not, he, who surveys it all from highest heaven, he knows - or maybe even he does not know.”*

Nāsadīya sūkta is the 129th hymn given in the Xth Maṇḍala of the Ṛgveda. This sukta consists of seven verses. These verses are concerned mainly with the origin of the universe, but this sukta does not propound a concrete theory regarding the origin of the universe, rather the sukta presents a speculative enquiry about the beginning of the world.

The discourse of Nāsadīya sūkta presents a complex and obscure structure; and due to such structure, it allows for multiple interpretations of the sukta. The aim of this sūkta, which starts with the puzzlement about the origin of the universe, does not end with a final or a concluding word or by giving a fix theory of the origin of the world, rather it ends by putting forth some more puzzles in the form of questions which again opens up a possibility of wide range of other questions. The most significant point of this sūkta, that the aim of the sukta was not to construct a final description and an explanation of how and why the universe started, becomes clear from the open-endedness which we find in all of its verses. It seems that the structural and analytical incomprehensibility is aimed knowingly in order to keep it open for multiple complex interpretations, in order to keep the process of thinking alive, and this stream of obscurity throughout the sukta constructs and reconstructs the history of Indian Philosophy.

Starting with the metaphysical enquiry about the fundamental questions of origin and creation of the universe, it progresses towards an epistemological issue as well. The metaphysical enquiry starts with putting forth the puzzles about the most fundamental problem of why, how, and by whom, about the creation of the universe. It does talk about the epistemological foundations, but an important aspect of the sukta is that the epistemological framework presents a presuppositionless view for the creation of the world. That is, it does not

* <https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/vishnu/nasadiya.pdf>

presuppose any infringement from the knowing subject. It transcends the epistemic enquiries of the knower. This surpassing of the knowing subject points towards the limitations of what one can know and what the boundaries of the knowing subject are. This knowledge is something which is beyond the boundaries of human intellect.

Negations, questions, and possibilities characterise the main theme throughout the sukta. Starting with a possibility, every sukta ends either with negating that possibility or in the form of questioning. The first verse starts with a denial of both the categories *sat* (existence) and *asat* (non-existence), of the world of experience, of space, and of sky. It shows the indeterminate character of *sat* and *asat* as the primordial cause of the world. The first verse presents the structure moving from negation to question and then to a questionable possibility. While the first verse gives the general description, second verse moves to specific details about death signifying mortality, and deathlessness signifying immortality, but these detailed particularities were not mentioned as an attempt to reach to the final answer, rather it signifies, more specifically, ‘what is not there’ before creation.

Contrary to the first verse, there is a mention of “the One” in the second verse which shifts the structure of the verse to a positive description of what does exist. The nature of the second verse increases the complexity of the process of cosmogony. The third verse again comes up with a possibility in the form of potential for existence, a power which was there in the form of heat. The fourth verse describes that thought originated from desire; here in the fifth verse desire thus becomes the origin of the world. Moreover, here thought which appears in the fifth verse, can be equated with the “One” which was the concealed subject of first three verses. By describing thought as the primal semen, or the fundamental principle, the fifth verse finds the reason of the process of reflective thinking of the earlier verses. What was presented in the first four verses was an attempt to build a gradual understanding through reflective thinking and finally the fifth verse presents a concrete idea about manifestation. Thought, along with desire as the manifested form of thought, are considered responsible for the manifoldness of the world. This verse signifies the role of thought in the trajectory of creation. However the search for the final answer does not end with this verse, for the last two verses come with questions again. Discussing about the possibilities of the origin of the world in first five verses, the last two verses reject all the earlier possibilities with the question that “who really knows how the universe came into existence”. This verse denies Gods being the creator of the world because it claims that Gods themselves are bound by the limits of time, i.e., something that originated after the creation of the world, something that

came after the bounds of space and time cannot be regarded as the creator of the world. The last verse again rejects all the previous attempts and efforts made to find a definite answer by putting forth the ultimate question that, “he who is the overseer of this (world) in the highest heaven might know, or if he does not know....?” This sukta does not resolve the mystery of creation; rather all steps which were moving towards clarity and certitude are rejected in the last two verses. Thus, the epistemic range of these verses goes from knowability to unknowability, and finally it comes into a realm which is beyond the categories of both known and unknown.

Thus we see that first five verses of Nāsadiya sūkta attempt to show a gradual development towards the core argument that thought is the seed of creation. Starting from the general principle, it moves to specific details, and after that it claims to have a form, and in the last step it reveals as thought. Apart from thought as the main creative principle, this sukta presents some other signs and references of creation and reproduction. We find the mention of “egg” in the third verse, the “breathing” principle in the second verse, and the reference of “without wind” and in the third verse, the mention of “**sign-less ocean**”, these two are interpreted respectively as “embryo” and the “fluid” in which the embryo rests. These hints cover all possible options of the principle of creation. All these different forms were attempts made to discuss the possibilities which could be responsible for the origin of the universe.

Though not offering a final theory, the structure of the sukta seems to have designed in such a manner which points towards an ending with a final polished outcome. Recursiveness in first and last verse can be seen as a sign of proving the initial proposal, the last verse repeats what was said in the first verse, in this poetic composition, the end line repeats what was said in the first line for the purpose of closure, or to strengthen the thesis which was proposed in the beginning. However, despite having a recursive nature, the last verse of Nasadiya sukta does not offer a closure, or prove the thesis which was proposed in the beginning. What it repeats is the uncertain nature of the origin, both in the beginning and in the end.

Lastly, the most important and intriguing part of the sukta is that the structured search to resolve the puzzle of origin leaves the final question un-answered, and leaves it to the listener or reader to find the fundamental, deep seated principle of creation. The goal of the sukta was not to explain the nature of that primordial creative principle or to present a comprehensive and complete picture of the origin. The aim was to spark within a thinking process by putting

forth questions in front of the listeners and that is what marks the central idea of this sukta which gives birth to possibilities for various interpretations.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How does Nasadiya Sukta explain the origin of universe through all its verses?

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2. What characterises the main theme of Nasadiya Sukta?

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12.3 INDIAN MATERIALISM

Indian materialism is generally termed as Lokāyata; the term Lokāyata means philosophy of the people, a philosophy that was common among the people; or a philosophy that belongs to this world (of matter). Cārvāka School of philosophy is also known from the name of materialism, but we also find the claim that Cārvāka was one of the founders of the philosophical school of Indian Materialism (and if we accept this claim then Cārvāka becomes the name of one philosopher), *Ajita Kesakambalin* (a thinker of early Buddhist period) is said to be the other founder of this school. Another interpretation which we find for the name Cārvāka is that the word Cārvāka is used as a common name for those people who are sweet-tongued, or who are materialists. By Materialism, one can understand that school of thought, which believes in the reality of matter. The claim of the materialists is that the reality of whatever exists beyond the world of matter, or what is not empirically verified, cannot be established. This central claim of materialism makes the approach of this school of thought scientific or naturalistic, and also set its path different from all other schools of Indian Philosophy.

12.3.1 The Early Sources

Unfortunately, there are no written texts available which can be claimed as the authentic source of thoughts pertaining to materialism; whatever description we find about materialism is available only in the form of criticism and refutation done by other philosophies.

We find references of some significant concepts of materialism in pre-Buddhist period. The use of the term Lokāyata is found in some early Buddhist literature. One such text is *Kuṭadanta Sutta*, where this word ‘Lokāyata’ has been used, and another is *Brahmajala Sutta*, wherein the concept of self is identified with the body^{*}, which shows the footprints of materialistic thought in these pre-Buddhist texts. We find the theory of accepting only four elements in an early Buddhist source which sums up the views of Ajita Kesakambli: “There is no such thing, O king, as alms or sacrifice or offering. There is neither fruit nor result of good or evil deeds. A human being is built up of four elements...”[†] Two implications can be drawn positively from the quotation mentioned above, one is that the fifth element, i.e., akasha is refuted by early materialist scholars, and second is the refutation of the law of karma. It thus proves the thesis of the refutation of transmigration of the soul by early materialist thinkers.

Another source of materialist thought is found in Buddhist dialogue Pāyāsi suttanta and Jaina work *Rāyapaseṇaijja*.[‡] Here again, the argument of both of these texts presents mainly the refutation of the existence of other world, and denying of bearing the fruit of one’s good and/or bad karmas.

Based on these early Buddhist writings, the fundamental claims of metaphysical and ethical principles of early materialists’ thought can be sketched easily, which mainly revolve around the concepts of this worldliness, identification of self with body, denial of the doctrine of karma, refutation of the re-embodiment or rebirth of the soul, because of denying any kind of karmic retribution of the soul. We find that theories pertaining to later Materialism are also characterised by similar chain of thoughts. We will discuss metaphysical and epistemological doctrines of materialism in detail in the next section of the unit.

12.3.2 Main Doctrines of Indian Materialism

The central argument of belonging to ‘this worldliness’ or material world is derived from the fundamental idea that reality consists of only four elements; these four elements are namely:

^{*} Chattopadhyaya Debiprasad. Lokāyata: A study in Ancient Materialism. P.20

[†] Chattopadhyaya Debiprasad. Quoted in, Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction. P.194

[‡] Chattopadhyaya Debiprasad, Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction. P.195

earth, water, fire, and air; akasha is not included in the list of fundamental elements by the materialists because its existence cannot be proved by sense perception, it is not perceived but inferred. Materialism claims that everything that exists in this world can be explained in terms of different combination and permutation of these four elements. Consciousness is also considered only a by-product of matter; it emerges when the four elements combine in a certain proportion, and perishes with the disintegration of the material body. The conscious principle is not denied by the materialists, it denies considering it as an independent entity. They claim that it is the result of the modification of matter in a certain proportion, and by saying this, they establish the primacy of matter over consciousness. The existence of a separate, eternal soul or a self beyond the physical body; everything, including independent reality of consciousness is rejected, because everything is reduced to matter, and can be explained in terms of material interactions. It is always seen associated with the body and never as independent from the physical body. Consciousness manifests itself through the living body, it is not something that continues to exist even after fading away of material body. They deny the existence of a permanently abiding soul and with this they reject the claim of idealists that soul can have a separate existence, for them, embodied self can only exist. Self is body qualified by the intelligence. This worldview of locating self/consciousness in the body/matter is also referred to as Deha-Vāda or Dehātmavāda.

Materialism considers sense-perception as one and the only valid means of knowledge. The materialistic understanding of the term Lokāyata also has its roots in the interpretation of it by some scholars 'as all that can be the object of sense-perception'. Knowledge that we attain through inference cannot be regarded as valid knowledge because materialism rejects the validity of inference. The basis of this rejection is the argument that, in case of inference, the universal relation (*vyāpti*) between the middle term and the minor term cannot be established. No source of valid knowledge can substantiate this universal relation, say between smoke and fire. Inference can sometimes be true and sometimes be false because it is limited to association or memory of past perceptions. Since the association is based on the observation of particular instances, there cannot be a logical certainty in case of the inductive relation, i.e. *vyapti*. Being limited only to particulars, perception cannot establish the universal relation, we would require another inference in order to verify it by inference; verbal testimony and other sources of knowledge rely on inferential knowledge, and thus they cannot verify the universal relation. Thus, not only inference, all other means of knowledge such as verbal testimony, *upamana*, etc. is considered invalid by materialistic philosophy.

Some scholars have raised questions upon the claim of completely rejecting the validity of inference by the materialistic philosophy. Hiriyanna has commented upon it by saying, “Thus it is commonly assumed by the critics that the Cārvāka denounced reasoning totally as a *pramāna*; but to judge from the reference to it in one Nyaya treatise, they seem to have rejected only such reasoning as was originally thought sufficient by others for establishing the existence of God, of a future life etc.”* Chattopadhyay has also doubted the claim of absolute refutation of inference by the Lokayatikas†. Some materialistic thinkers (*Purandara*) (*Purandara*) have claimed that inference is not useful in establishing any truth of the transcendental world, but it is a useful tool in determining the nature of things related to this world. Thus based on the above mentioned references, it can be regarded as one of the possibilities that inference which was helpful in the matters of empirical world was not rejected completely in the materialistic framework. Only those claims of inferential knowledge were denied which were beyond the reach of this world (e.g. life after death, existence of soul as something separate from matter, law of karma, etc.)

Third thesis of materialism is characterised by their denial of the law of karma. By denying this, they end the possibility of the concept of other world; of reaping the fruits of one’s karma, and of a trans-migrating soul. For them, pleasure of the individual becomes the sole aim of life, and death becomes the end of life because nothing remains after it. The concept of general good/the good of other is not accepted by this school of thought, for which the individual can make his/her interests secondary. Rejecting the chain of cause and effect has its roots in the rejection of the law of karma. Materialists advocated the idea of *svabhāvavāda*, which regards that the manifoldness of things is due to the nature/*svabhāva* inherent in things themselves and is not originated from any cause. By accepting *Svabhāvavāda*, they basically reject the theory of causation, because they claim that there is no causal connection between cause and effect. We also find reference of the refutation of the law of causation in Jaina writings, Jaina thinker Guṇaratna‡ rejects all possibilities of the law of karma, and with this he also claims that the manifoldness of the world can be explained by natural causes.

Out of four *purusharthas*, materialism accepts only two human values or *puruṣārthas*, i.e., *Kāma* and *Artha*, and rejects *Dharma* and *Mokṣa*, and thus it limits the efforts of the

* Hiriyanna, M. *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 188

† Chattopadhyay, Debiprasad, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction*. P.189.

‡ Quoted in Chattopadhyay, Debiprasad, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction*. P.194.

individual to attain the pleasures of the senses only. We do not find any mention of accepting qualitative pleasure, or a difference between quantitative and qualitative pleasures in the ethical principles of materialistic outlook. What it considers is only the quantity of pleasure, i.e. one's work should be aimed towards attaining maximum pleasure and that is the sole aim of life, and following this principle enjoyment becomes the only reality, which is also termed as unqualified hedonism by some scholars.

One of the main reasons of criticism of materialism by other schools of Indian Philosophy may be the denial of moral values, human values which we acquire to act in accordance with certain norms of any specific institution, and the larger aim of it is to work for the betterment of the society; and second, the denial of the supreme end of life which is regarded as something over and above the bodily pleasures.

At the end, it can be said that by emphasising upon the world of senses through the process of speculation; Materialism, or Lokāyata closes all the doors of a higher virtuous life, with a place and respect for human values. With this it repudiates all other concepts of authority, of a belief in a transcendental being which is regarded as the supreme principle in almost all other schools of Indian Philosophy. However, the primacy of matter over spirit may said to be a bold outlook, and to explain the world on the basis of matter as well.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How does materialism prove the existence of consciousness?

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2. What are the reasons to reject the validity of inference by Materialism?

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12.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to explain two major philosophical approaches: one explaining the

possibilities of the origin of the universe, and the other attempting to explain everything in terms of material interaction. We observed how Materialism boldly rejects all those claims which cannot be established through the existence of matter and reduces even the existence of self to a bodily self. We also observed the significance of unanswered questions in Nasadiya Sukta, and how it nourishes our intellectual capacities in order to ponder over and reconstruct new possibilities of interpretations and ask more questions.

12.5 KEY WORDS

Cosmogony: The study of structure and origin of the universe.

Dehātmavāda: A theory which explains the existence of consciousness in and through matter.

Transmigration of Soul: A form of reincarnation or passing of soul from one body to another after death.

12.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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<https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/vishnu/nasadiya.pdf>

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

(**Note:** Only hints are given here for answering the questions, please elaborate your answers with the help of these hints.)

Check Your Progress I

1. Starting from the general principle, it moves to specific details, and after that it claims to have a form, and in the last step it reveals as thought. This sukta does not resolve the mystery of creation; rather all steps which were moving towards clarity and certitude are rejected in

the last two verses. Thus the epistemic range of these verses goes from knowability to unknowability, and finally it comes into a realm which is beyond the categories of both known and unknown

2. Negations, questions, and possibilities characterise the main theme throughout the sūktā. Starting with a possibility, every sukta ends either with negating that possibility or in the form of questioning.

Check Your Progress II

1. Consciousness is the result of the modification of matter in a certain proportion, The existence of a separate, eternal soul or a self beyond the physical body; everything, including independent reality of consciousness is rejected, because everything is reduced to matter, and can be explained in terms of material interactions. It is always seen associated with the body and never as independent from the physical body.

2. The reason to reject the validity of inference is that in case of inference, the universal relation (*vyāpti*) between the middle term and the minor term cannot be established. No source of valid knowledge can substantiate this universal relation, say between smoke and fire. There cannot be a logical certainty in case of an inductive relation, i.e. *vyāpti*. Being limited only to particulars, perception cannot establish the universal relation, we would require another inference in order to verify it by inference; verbal testimony and other sources of knowledge rely on inferential knowledge, and thus they cannot verify the universal relation.

UNIT 13 BUDDHISM AND JAINISM*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Metaphysical Views of Buddhism
- 13.3 Doctrine of Dependent Origination
- 13.4 Metaphysical views of Jainism
- 13.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 Further Readings and References
- 13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit is to present,

- metaphysical views of Early Buddhism
- metaphysical views of Jainism

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Siddhārtha (Later known as Buddha) was born in the sixth century B.C. When Siddhārtha woke up to the fact that the world is full of suffering, his mind got restless to find a solution for the ills of life. In fact, for him the individual instances of suffering were illustrations of a universal problem. Finding that the things of sense are empty, Siddhārtha decided to renounce the comfort of the palace and became a wanderer, for in those days the seekers of light began their search by repudiating the comforts of life and wandering in search of truth.

* Prof. Sudha Gopinath, Koramangala, Bangalore. (This unit is the revised version of the units “Buddhism-I” and “Jainism” of BPYC-131).

He made this great renunciation at the age of twenty-nine and first tried to find spiritual rest by philosophical thought under the tutelage of great teachers of that time. But soon he found that subtle dialectics are no cure for mental unrest. The other means of escape was through bodily austerities. He wandered with five ascetics who underwent bodily mortifications of the most severe type. However, the fervour of asceticism did not give him any solace and hence decided to have a fresh course of self-discipline characterized by less vigour. He won over all evil thoughts and dispositions, conquered desire (*tṛṣṇā*), attachment (*rāga*) and aversion (*arati*). He gained a deep insight into the mysteries of existence – first of self and then of human destiny in general and lastly of the universe as a whole. Thus seated under the *bodhi tree*, a new light dawned on Siddhārtha and he became the enlightened one or the Buddha. Legend says that when he sat under the tree in meditation, *Māra* tried to distract him. But the Buddha conquered every temptation (*Māra*) and hence he is called hero (*Vīra*), the Victor (*Jina*) and *Tathāgata*, the one who knows things as they are. He is *Arhat*, the worthy. Buddha's mission now was to help the great multitude of people who were living in sin and infamy. He preached the Gospel of the four Noble Truths and the eight-fold path to the troubled world. The peace and serenity on Buddha's face just made him very dear to anyone who came under his influence. His first pupils were his five ascetic friends who had gone away from him when as Siddhārtha, he decided to give up severe asceticism.

There are many versions of the Buddhist scriptures written either in Pāli, Prākṛt or in Sanskrit. It is not possible to say that all that has come down to us is absolutely authentic and are Buddha's own words. Certain old works are identified as those which serve as the basis of our knowledge of early Buddhism. These works are written in Pāli, which may be a dialect of Sanskrit or may be a different language.

The canon is generally known as *Tripitaka* (The Three Baskets) after the three sections into which it is divided. They Are: –

Suttas or utterances of Buddha himself,

Vinaya or rules of conduct,

Abhidhamma or philosophical discussions.

These *piṭakas* are often in the form of dialogues and there is no methodical discussion in them of any topic in the modern sense of the term. They contain many metaphors and allegories, which is also the cause of some indefiniteness about the doctrine of the Buddha.

Of the three *piṭakas* the *suttas* are very important because they contain discourses by Buddha. It is divided into five sections:

Digha Nikāya (long discourses)

Majjima Nikāya (discourses of shorter length)

Saṅyutta Nikāya (collection of short pronouncements)

Anguttara Nikāya (short passages arranged in sections)

Khuddaka Nikāya (a matter of works of varying types containing *Dhammapada*, *Jataka tales*, etc.)

The *Vinaya Pitaka* contains the rules of conduct of the Buddhist order of monks and nuns. The *Abhidhamma piṭaka* is a collection of seven works on Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics.

There are numerous other works in Pāli, which are not generally considered canonical. The most important are the commentaries on the books of the canon. It is believed that most of these were compiled in Ceylon by the great doctor Buddhaghosa of the fifth century A.D. from earlier commentaries. At a later date, Jataka verses were made into prose and that is one of their most beautiful narrative literatures. Buddhaghosa is also the author of 'Visuddhimagga', which means 'The way of purification'. Another very important Pāli work of early date is 'Milindapañha' i.e., the questions of King Menander. The inscriptions of emperor Ashoka (273-232 B.C.) are also of great value because they are inspired by Buddhism inculcating the moral philosophy of Buddhism.

Though Buddhism is a non-Vedic school and essentially different from the *Upaniṣads* in one sense we can say that certain Upanishadic tendencies are carried to their logical conclusions by the Buddha. For example, the *Upaniṣads* are against the belief in a personal God and the Buddha dismisses that conception altogether. So also, the self is explained negatively in the *Upaniṣads* and the Buddha eliminates the conception of a self, altogether. Buddha's belief in Karma doctrine is a clear proof of the connection of Buddhism with the *Upaniṣads*.

For Buddhism, there are ills (heya), and their causes (heya-hetu), so also a cure (hāna) and a path (hānapāya) exist. This is just like the science of medicine. If there is an ailment (roga), there will be a cause for it (roga-hetu). Once the cause of the ailment is diagnosed, the cure is

not far away. This shows that though the Buddha said that all is suffering – *Sarvam Dukham*, he did not stop at that. Buddha’s doctrine is not a creed of despair. Even though he points out that misery is a fact, he does not say that man is doomed. Man can get peace here and now, says Buddha.

Jainism is a way old form of heterodox system which repudiates the teachings of the *Vedas*. The word ‘Jainism’ is derived from ‘jina’ which means conqueror, i.e., one who has conquered his passions and desires. In all probability Jainism arose in the later Vedic period, and it was revived by Vardhamāna, also called Mahāvīra or the great Spiritual hero, in the 6th century B.C. Vardhamāna was the last in a series of prophets. According to tradition, twenty three prophets preceded him. Vardhamāna was the twenty-fourth prophet or Tirthankara. Jaina tradition ascribes the origin of the system to Ṛṣabha.

Vardhamāna was born in a princely family in north Bihar about 540 B.C. On attaining his 30th year, he renounced all empirical comforts and led a life of severe abstinence and meditation. After thirteen years of such penance he attained illumination securing freedom from all ills. He then became a ‘jina’ or a spiritual leader, a word from which the term ‘Jainism’ is derived.

Jainism, like Buddhism and Cārvāka/Lokāyata, does not believe in the authority of the *Vedas*. All these three heterodox systems also are alike in so far as they do not believe in a supreme God. But unlike Cārvāka and Buddhism, Jainism believes in permanent entities like the self and matter, because of which Jainism is described as a theological meaning between Brāhminism and Buddhism.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write a note on the Siddhartha’s journey for truth.

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13.2 METAPHYSICAL VIEWS OF BUDDHISM

Early Buddhism recognizes the distinction between consciousness and matter but does not accept either a permanent self or a permanent unchanging material or physical world. Buddha established that there is nothing permanent and declared that everything is *anattā* or not self. Buddhist writings declare thus – “At any moment of experience, we stumble upon some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure.” As given in experience, the Buddha believed in these transient sensations and said that it is not necessary to believe that these sensations belong to a permanent self. That is, he believed in only the states of consciousness. To him a sensations and the thought together with the physical frame with which they are associated are themselves the self. He described the self as an aggregate or *Samhāta*. It is a psycho-physical entity known as *nāma-rūpa* (name and form). *Nāma* or name refers to the physical factors and *rūpa* or form refers to the physical frame. A Close analysis of the ‘self shows that it is made up of five factors or *skandhas*. They Are:

Sensation or feeling (*vedanā*) of pleasure, pain and indifference; Perception or idea (*samjñā*) conceptual knowledge; Conative disposition (*saṃskāra*); Discriminative intelligence or reason (*vijñāna*); Physical form.

This brings out clearly the analytical character of Buddhism Highlighting The Psychological basis of its analysis. The explanation given about material things is similar. To the Buddha the attributes themselves are the objects and he denied any self-sustaining substance, apart from them. Thus, the material things, like the self, are also aggregates. This is Buddha’s *nairātmya vāda* or denial of the soul.

The other important view of Buddhism is *kṣanika vāda* or the Law of Momentariness, according to which both the mental and physical reality are subjected to constant flux. When we look around us we notice that everything is subjected to constant change and nothing is permanent. To some extent, it is language, which leads to the mistaken notion of something enduring. We use one word to refer to one thing and one name to refer to one particular person and that makes us believe that a thing or a person is enduring even though it is constantly changing. Buddhism says that when we say “It thinks” or “It is white”, we mean by the ‘It’, nothing more than when we say, “It rains”. There are several parables in Buddhist literature to bring home to us the full import of the doctrine. The most famous parable is that

of the chariot. In the work, “Questions of king Milinda”, a conversation between the Greek King Menander and a Buddhist sage, Nāgasena is recorded. The sage described the doctrine of no self but the king was not convinced. In order to make the king understand the theory, the sage asked him if the king came on foot or in a chariot. To this the king replied that he always travelled in a chariot. On learning this, the sage asked the king to define the chariot. Counting on the various parts of the chariot, the sage asked if we could call the pole, or the wheels or the axle as the chariot. This example made the king realize that ‘chariot’ is just a symbol for the various parts assembled together in a particular way. According to Buddhism, both soul and matter exist only as complexes and neither is a single self-contained entity. The fundamental teaching of Buddhism is the doctrine of dependent origination.

13.3 DOCTRINE OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

According to this doctrine, “this arising that arises, this ceasing that ceases to be.” The doctrine of universal change and impermanence follows from this fundamental teaching of Buddhism, viz., Pratitya Samutpāda (*Pacciya Samutpāda*). Change can be understood in terms of conditional existence. This law of causation is the basis of continuity. Both the elements of the material world and of the mental world are subjected to laws of physical and moral causation. This law insists on the necessity of sufficient conditions. Buddha neither believed in ‘Being nor non-Being’; but only in ‘Becoming’. Thus he gave a dynamic explanation of the real. The symbols generally used to illustrate this conception are the stream of water and the self-consuming flame. Just as the flame and the stream of water, both the metal and the physical reality are subjected to constant flux. When we view the aggregate, be it the self or the material object in time, we notice that they are not the same even for two moments. So the self and the material world are each a flux (*sañtāna*). Just as the flame and the stream of water, everything is only a series (*vithi*) – a succession of similar things or happenings. The notion of fixity we have of them is wholly fictitious. There were two views currently during the time when Buddha philosophized – one believing in Being and the other in non-Being. Buddha opposed both these views when he propounded his view of reality as dynamic. . Thus, according to Buddhism, neither Being nor non-Being is the truth; the truth is that everything is ‘Becoming’. We know through experience that everything is characterized by birth, growth, decay and death, which means that everything is subjected to constant change and that nothing is permanent. What is important to note is that for Buddha, there is incessant change but at the same time there is nothing that changes. There is action but no

agent. Since everything is a series, it is relevant to ask as to what is the relation between any two successive members of the series. One explanation given during the time of the Buddha was that it is accidental, and the other explanation did recognize a causal relation as underlying the succession but introduced a supernatural power like God in addition to the known factors. Buddha rejected both these views and postulated necessity as the sole governing factor. In denying chance he took his stand on the uniformity of nature and in denying supernatural intervention; he disassociated himself from all dogmatic religion. According To Buddhism, the causal law governing change in the phenomenal world is not a mere unfolding of a cause but the result of certain external factors co-operating with it. Change can be understood in terms of conditional existence. In other words, a causal series will not begin unless certain conditions are fulfilled and the series will continue so long as all the factors are there. The series will end only when one or more co-operating factors are withdrawn. For example, the flame series will not start until the wick, the oil, etc. are there and will continue till one or more of the factors are withdrawn. The law itself is universal and does not admit of exceptions but yet the operation of the law is dependent on conditions. This is the precise reason why it is called “dependent origination” or “*pratītya samutpāda*” - that being present, this becomes; from the arising of that, this arises”. The literal meaning of the phrase ‘*pratītya samutpāda*’ is “arising in correlation with”. Conversely, the law indicates that when the conditions cease to be, the series will cease, or “from the cessation of that, this ceases.”

The Buddhist psychology, which explains their views on epistemology, is also based on the theory of causation, or law of dependent origination. As pointed out earlier, the *nāma rūpa* (aggregate of name and form) refer to five conditions and they arise depending upon one another. In *Samyutta-Nikāya* III 1.0.1, it is said, “The four *mahābhūtas* (the elements of fire, air, water and earth) were the *hetu* and *paccaya/pratyaya* (reason and cause) for the communication of the *rūpa khandha* (form). Contact is the cause of the communication of the feelings (*vedanā*); sense contact is also the *hetu* and *paccaya* for the communication of the *sannakkandha* (specific knowing), sense- contact is also the *hetu* and *paccaya* for the communication of the *sankhārakkandha* (mental states and synthetic activity). But *nāma rūpa* is the *hetu* and *paccaya* for the communication of the *vinanakkanda* (reason).”

Pratītya Samutpāda or the theory of dependent origination is the most significant in early Buddhism. It is central to all the views of the Buddha. Unlike the other causal theories like *svabhāva vāda*, which lead to determinism, Buddha’s views make room for human effort.

After the great renunciation, under the bodhi tree, it is the law of contingent causation, which, at last, flashed across Siddhārtha's mind and made him the 'Buddha'. The theory states, "that becoming, this becomes or that being absent, this does not become" which means that every effect has a series of causes and hence the Buddha went on to find the cause of suffering and the method by which with one's own effort, freedom from suffering is possible. Before going on to Buddha's practical teachings it is necessary to examine some of the criticism leveled against Buddhism.

One of the commonly alluded criticisms against Kṣāṇika vāda or the doctrine of momentariness is as to how such a theory can account for memory. If everything is continually renewed, it is important to know how recognition of objects, the apprehension of objects as the same that we already know is explained. Buddhism answers that things in the two moments of cognition are only similar and we mistake them to be the same. In other words, all recognition is erroneous since similarity is mistaken for identity. As regards memory, the Buddhist explanation is that each phase of experience as it appears and disappears is wrought up into the next, so that every successive phase has within it all the potentialities of its predecessors which manifest when the conditions are favorable. Hence, though a man is not the same in two successive moments, he is not quite different. The self is not only a collection entity but also a recollect-ive entity. It is on this basis Buddhism establishes moral responsibility. This is clear from the suttas of Buddhism and their Jātaka Stories, where a sinner is pointed at and told that he alone reaps the fruits of his actions. Buddhism denies unity in the sense of identity of material, but recognizes continuity in its place. If we represent two self-series as A1, A2, A3...and B1, B2, B3, ... though the two series are not identical, there is a kinship among the members of each series. That is, there is a kinship between A1, A2, A3...etc., but A1 will not have a kinship with B1 or A2 with B2 and so on. Thus, Buddhism recognizes a 'fluid self', which cannot be regarded as altogether a dissimilar or distinct series. Several thinkers commenting on this aspect of Buddhism have opined that by giving the above theory, the Buddhist has tacitly admitted a self, transcending the experience of the moment because a series can never become aware of itself. Some others are of the opinion that Buddha did not disbelieve in the concept of self but the later followers of the Buddha innovated the negation of the self. This point is debatable but it goes without saying that the principles of impermanence and no-self are fundamental to the teachings of the Buddha.

Early Buddhism recognized only four elements or bhūtas viz., earth, fire and air. They did not believe in the concept of ākāśa. However, we must remember that these names are only conventional and they do not stand for anything more than the sense data associated with them viz., hardness, fluidity, heat and pressure respectively. The material world, our senses and our bodies are all aggregates derived from these elements and they are called bhautika to indicate their secondary character. The psychical aspects are called caitta or mental “Dharma dhātu” is the term used in Buddhism to refer to the causal elements that are responsible for the manifestation of phenomena. Dharma dhātu has two aspects:

The world of phenomenal manifestation.

The state of ‘thusness’ or noumena.

The causal theory of Buddhism usually applies to the phenomenal world but in speaking of the ideal world as realized the latter sense is also applied. Taking the first sense of the term ‘dharma dhātu’ it refers to the actual world, the realm of all elements of phenomenal existence. Causal origination is thus the theory, which sets out the fact that all beings are correlative, interdependent and mutually originating. Matter and mind arise simultaneously due to interdependence. It refers to the totality of all existence- Dharma dhātu, in its reference to the world, speaks of the sphere of saṃsāra (life flux), the cycle of birth and death, which is one of dynamic becoming. Thus, all created beings dependent on the principle of cause and effect are within its realm. Taken in this sense, only the Buddha or enlightened being is outside the dharma dhātu. In the second sense, i.e., in the sense of thusness or noumena, it signifies the state of liberation or ‘Nirvāṇa.’ It is the stage of cessation of all becoming, it is the true state of all things in the universe, freedom from bondage and the final release from

13.4 METAPHYSICAL VIEWS OF JAINISM

The distinguishing feature of Jainism is its belief in the eternal and independent existence of spirit and matter or in the animate and inanimate respectively called Jīva and ajiva. But by spirit we have to understand only the individual self and not the supreme soul as in the *Upaniṣads*. According to Jainism, the jīvas are many in number and even material entities possess a soul. One of the curious features of Jainism is the belief in the variable size of the Jīva in its empirical condition. It is capable of expansion and contraction according to the dimension of the physical body with being. In Their Empirical form they are classified as having one sense, two senses and so forth. Jains believe that the Jīva is both an experiment

(bhoktā) and an agent (kartā). The intrinsic nature of the Jīva is perfection and is characterized by infinite intelligence, infinite peace, infinite nature of the Jīva is obscured though not destroyed. Again, the difference in bound Jīvan is due to the degrees of their connection with matter. Karma is conceived as subtle particles of matter, and the presence of karmic matter in the soul is the cause of the soul's bondage.

Consciousness, according to Jainism, is the very essence of Jīva. They say that in an inorganic body, the soul's consciousness is dormant while it is active in the organic body. Knowledge is a quality of the soul and a conscious self-experiences perception, intention, etc. Jains prove the existence of the soul by pointing out that the soul is directly experienced owing to the 'I – consciousness' (aham pratyaya) in "I did, I do, and I shall do". Jains point out that doubt presupposes a doubter as its ground. That ground is a soul or conscious self. Further, jains point out that consciousness cannot be the quality of a material body because the body has form and knowledge, feeling, etc. Again, the material body cannot be the substratum of consciousness because perception, memory, etc are absent in deep sleep or death even though the body is present.

Jīva's relation to matter explains the Jaina view of knowledge. Knowledge is not something that characterizes the Jīva but it constitutes Jīva's very essence. The Jīva therefore can know everything unaided directly and exactly as it is if there is no impediment in its way. In other words, all knowledge is in the soul though it manifests itself only when the impending media are removed. The knowledge which a Jīva has is fragmentary because of the obstruction caused by karma which interferes with its power of perception. The impediments are passions and emotions. The Jaina, therefore, recognizes differences in the extent of enlightenment that a self may possess depending upon the extent to which obstacles (karma) have been removed. But there can be no self without knowledge or knowledge without a self. The culmination of enlightenment is reached when the obstacles are completely broken down. This is kevala jñāna when one becomes omniscient. This knowledge is pure because it is immediate and is obtained without any aid like sense, mind, etc. Thus, from the Jaina point of view, senses and mind are aids to knowledge only from the empirical point of view. They are also impediments being part of matter.

Jaina epistemology points out that the process of knowledge does not modify the object of knowledge. The consciousness of the Jīva is ever active and this activity reveals its own nature as well as that of the object. As light reveals itself and other objects, so also

knowledge reveals itself and other objects. Again In knowing anything, the self knows itself simultaneously. If it did not know itself, nothing else could impart this knowledge to it.

Consciousness which is the essence of jīva has two manifestations – (i) darśana or intuition (ii) jñāna or knowledge. In the case of intuition, the details are not perceived while in knowledge the details are also known. Darśana is simple apprehension while jñāna is conceptual knowledge. In its perfect condition referred to as Kevala Jñāna, darśana and jñāna are together. Such knowledge is perfect, free from any doubt or uncertainty.

Apart from jīva, the other everlasting category of the universe is ajīva. According to Jainism, the whole universe can be brought under one or other of the two everlasting, uncreated, co-existing but independent categories described as jīva and ajīva. That which has consciousness is jīva and that which has no consciousness but can be touched, tasted, seen and smelt is ajīva. Jīva and ajīva do not correspond to ‘I’ and ‘not I’, but it is an objective classification of things in the universe. This Classification clearly shows the realistic and relative stand point of Jainism. The ajīva is the object and Jainism says that as sweaty as there is a subject that knows so sweaty there is an object that is known.

The term ‘ajīva’ is used to denote the five categories of pudgala (matter), kāla (time), dharma (motion), adharma (rest) and ākāśa (space). Of these, dharma, adharma, ākāśa and kāla are without form (arūpa) and matter is with form (rūpa). Their essential distinction from the jīva is that they as such lack life and consciousness.

Pudgala denotes matter or material object in general. Matter possesses colour, flavour, odour and touch. Sound is considered not as a quality but as a mode of it. Matter is not created but indistinguishable and real. It is real and independent of the perceiving mind. The basic definition of pudgala, which stands for matter in Jainism, is “that which can be experienced by the five sense organs.” The second definition is derived from the etymology of the compound word ‘pudgala’. The term ‘pud’ refers to the process of combination and ‘gala’ stand for disassociation. The significance of the definition lies in the atomic theory of the Jains. The term ‘anu’ which means atom is found in the *Upaniṣads* but there is no systematic atomic theory in the *Upaniṣads*. We can say that the Jaina atomic theory is the earliest. The ultimate constituent of matter is aṇu or paramāṇu (atom). The atoms are all of the same kind, yet they can give rise to an infinite variety of things. Even the elements of earth, water, fire and air are divisible and have a structure. By developing the respective characteristics of odour, flavour, etc. the atoms become differentiated and thus the material world is divided

though the atoms are not different from one another qualitatively. Therefore matter has two forms, one atomic or simple and the other compound called skandha. The process of combination of atoms gives rise to the molecules or skandha. All perceivable objects are skandhas. It is the combination of molecules that is responsible for the different types of objects with varying qualities. Six forms of skandha are recognized

Bhadra (Gross) – Bhadra: This type of skandha when split cannot regain the original undivided form. For example, solids.

Bhadra: When split, this type of skandha has the capacity to join together, for example, liquids.

Bhadra – Sukṣma (finer): This type of skandha appears gross but is really subtle. It can neither be split, nor pierced through or taken up in hand, for example, Sun, heat, shadow, light, etc. Minute particles of these are evident to senses.

Sukṣma – Bhadra: This type of skandha appears subtle but is really gross, for example, sensation of touch, colour and sound.

Sukṣma: Skandhas of this type are extremely subtle and they are beyond sense perception. It is matter in this subtle form that constitutes karma, which by its influx into the jīva brings on saṃsāra or bondage.

Sukṣma - Sukṣma: They are finer than Sukṣma Skandhas.

From the atomic theory, it is clear that the Jaina view of reality is identity and change. The Jaina view states that to suffer change and yet endure is the privilege of existence. The change or modes are known as paryāyas, which come into being, persist for at least for one instant and then disappear. The change is due to the different modes of combination of atoms. Underlying all the changing modes is the fact there is the identity of the ultimate constituents, the atoms. Thus in the atoms, we find the identity element, in their combining to form molecules and in the division of and addition of atoms, we find the element of change. According to Jainism, the nature of reality is such that there is a constant factor while there is change, which is also real. Thus Jainism defines reality as one-in-many.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is consciousness, according to Jain Philosophy?

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13.5 LET US SUM UP

Buddhism believes in the doctrine of flux and dependend origination. Each moment arises due to some cause and this moment perishes and can cause another moment.

Jainism believes the multifacetedness of Reality. Objects are multiple and each object has mutilple qualities. Jainism claims that we are limited being and a limited being can know only some of the aspects/dimensions of an object.

13.6 KEY WORDS

Appanage : An appanage is the grant of an estate, titles, offices, or other things of value to the younger male children of a sovereign, who under the system of primogeniture would otherwise have no inheritance.

Relativism : Relativism is the idea that some elements or aspects of experience or culture are relative to, i.e., dependent on other elements or aspect.

The Jātaka Tales : The Jātaka Tales refer to a voluminous body of folklore-like literature native to India concerning the previous births (jāti) of the Buddha. The word most specifically refers to a text division of the Pāli Canon of Theravada Buddhism, included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Jātaka also refers to the traditional commentary on this book.

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13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1) When Siddhārtha (Siddha+ artha) woke up to the fact that the world is full of suffering, his mind got restless to find a solution for the ills of life. In fact, for him the individual instances of suffering were illustrations of a universal problem. Finding that the things of sense are empty, Siddhārtha decided to renounce the comfort of the palace and became a wanderer, for in those days the seekers of light began their search by repudiating the comforts of life and wandering in search of truth.

Check Your Progress II

1) Consciousness is the very essence of Jīva.

Consciousness which is the essence of jīva has two manifestations –

(i) darśana or intuition (ii) jñāna or know

(i) Darśana is simple apprehension while (ii) jñāna is conceptual knowledge.

UNIT 14 PHILOSOPHY OF THE EPICS*

Structure

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 An Overview

14.3 Reflection on the Core Issues/Concepts

14.4 Philosophical Response

14.5 Let Us Sum Up

14.6 Key Words

14.7 Further Readings and References

14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, students are expected to know the following:

- Philosophy and Literature: Darsána and *Sahitya*
- Epics as *Mahākāvya*: Definition and Variety
- An overview of the Major *Mahākāvya*s
- An overview of The *Mahābhārata* and The *Bhagavad-Gīta*
- An overview of The *Rāmāyaṇa*
- Philosophical Imprint of the Epics.

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14.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy, in its original sense, denotes a quest for a vision that captures the essence of the world as a whole. In Greek antiquity, ‘*sophia*’ and ‘*philo*’ together meant the love of wisdom and the result as vision was described as ‘*kosmotheoria*’. German philosophers called this synoptic vision ‘*weltanschauung*’ or simply a world-view. The same enterprise is called Darsāna in Indian philosophical parlance. Now, this vision would also include its narrative in the form of literature. Many philosophers and literary theorists, from West as well as East, have contended that both the disciplines should not be seen in isolation. They converge at many points and thereby being complementary and supplementary to each other. Philosophy devoid of concrete illustration from the historic world is blind and historicity without any philosophy is empty and dry.

The above point is most evident when we analyze a particular genre of poetry (or in general of literature) known as *epic*. The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. Around the eighteenth century, it was extended to mean a grand and heroic form. Accordingly, Miller Williams defined epic as a long narrative told on a grand scale of time and place, featuring a larger than life protagonist and heroic action. In India this sense of epic has existed since thousands of years ago. In Indian context, the epics may be denoted by *laukika sāhitya* (folk literature) or *Mahākāvya* (the great poems). In this unit, we will understand the basis of such division of literature and a detailed reflection on the contents, themes, and philosophy of the first two great epics of India out of the following:

- 1- Hindu Epics
 - i. The *Mahābhārata*
 - ii. The *Rāmayaṇa*
 - iii. Epics of Kālidāsa
- 2- Buddhists Epics of Ashvaghoṣa
- 3- Jaina Epics

14.2 AN OVERVIEW

Before we delve deep into the contents, themes, and philosophy of major Indian epics, we need to construct a basic understanding of *kāvya* in Sanskrit literature. The word ‘*kāvya*’ has been described in many ways by various philosophers yet the universal consensus is that the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. It also involves aesthetic sensitivity. Accordingly, all the genres of Sanskrit literature of great importance would come under *kāvya*.

Kāvya is further divided into two kinds

1- *Sravya Kāvya* –

It is that which is linguistic, can be communicated verbally either through reading or perceiving. It would include genres like *padya* (poetry), *gadya* (prose) and *champu* (a mixture of *gadya* and *padya*). Further *gadya kāvya* is divided into *kathā* (story) and *akhyāyikā* (narratives). Finally, *padya kāvya* is divided in *Mahākāvya*, *khaṇḍakāvya* and *muktaka kāvya*. The last division is based on the volume of the content.

2- *Drśya Kāvya* –

It goes beyond the verbal communication as it involves communication of *rasa* through the characters. It might focus on their dress, gestures, curves, designs, actions, drama, and other fine arts. It also essentially involves visual metaphors (*rūpaka*).

Origin and Development of *Kāvya*/ *Mahākāvya*

Kāvyas in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of Ṛgveda. Usha Sukta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kāvya* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha, Śrīharṣa, etc. In this unit, we shall explore the insights of the first two *Mahākāvya*.

Characteristics of *Mahākāvya* –

Ancient Indian scholars, like Bhamaha, author of Agnipurana, Dandi, Hemchandra, Vishvanatha, have attempted to formulate some essential characteristics in great detail. Among them, Dandi's description of a *Mahākāvya* is most fascinating and universally accepted. Dandi, in his book *Kavyadarsha*, mentions that an Epic should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*aśīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdesātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.

Its protagonist should be of high moral caliber like patience, wisdom, courage, piety, etc. and should belong to a descent lineage. Protagonists can be one or many but have to be from the same or higher lineage. It should be structured in cantos (*sarga*), i.e., in different sections. The number of cantos must be at least eight and in every canto, only one particular kind of meter (*chand*) of the verses must be employed. The only exceptions are the last few verses, which can have slight modifications in their *chand*.

Furthermore, a *Mahākāvya* must exhibit either *śringāra rasa* (adornment) or *vīr rasa* (courage) or *sānta rasa* (peace) as the primary rasa the remaining two as secondary rasa. It must portray a harmonious picture of the four *puruṣārtha*- *dharma* (righteousness) *artha* (wealth) *kāma* (sensuous pleasure) and *Mokṣa* (ultimate Bliss as liberation). In addition, it must also vividly describe some common themes such as city, village, ocean, mountains, sunset, sunrise, garden, water-play, marriage, union and separation, child-birth, war, etc.

From the above characteristics, it is clearly evident that the *Mahākāvya*s were not just for the sake of literary scholarship, but they had specific philosophical leanings. The idea of salutation in the beginning (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), development of moral character, exhibition of life in its myriad form, the goal of life as *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*, are some of the essential philosophical underpinnings of Epics or *Mahākāvya*. In the following sections, we shall delve deep into these philosophical notions after providing a brief sketch of the *Mahākāvya*s, viz., the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the meaning and characteristics of epic and *Mahākāvya*?

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2. Briefly sketch the origin and development of *Mahākāvya*?

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Sanskrit literature can be broadly divided into two parts- *vedika* and *laukika*. *Vedika sāhitya* pertains to the transcendental philosophical matters. It includes *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*. It is also called *śabda pramāṇa*. *Laukika sāhitya* pertains to the worldly subject matter. Common people have direct access to them and which in turn influences their day-to-day activities of private and public sphere. The first *kavi* of *vedic sāhitya* was *Brahmā* while the first *kavi* of *laukika sāhitya* is the sage *Vālmīki*. *Vālmīki* is therefore known as the *adi kavi*. *Ādi* means the first and the great both.

1. *The Rāmāyaṇa*

As indicated above the parameters of being the first and the great both justify the title of *Vālmīki* as *ādi* when we analyze his great epic work ‘the *Rāmāyaṇa*’. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru- The story of the epic is a part of the texture of the lives of our people. In its praise A.A.

Macdonell also writes – Probably no work of world literature, secular in origin, has ever produced such a profound influence on the life and thought of people as the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The Texture of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Though *Rāmāyaṇa* is so widely popular in India, that a detailed narration would be repeated yet we need to briefly grasp the texture of this Epic. Etymologically ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’ comes from the two Sanskrit words – *Rāma* and *āyaṇa* meaning the path or place of Rāma. It is the grand and heroic journey of prince Rāma. The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains 24000 verses (*ślokas*) divided into seven chapters or cantos, namely, Bālakāṇḍa, Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Aranyakāṇḍa, Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Sundarkāṇḍa, Yuddhakāṇḍa, and Uttarakāṇḍa. A brief summary of these chapters is as follows:

1. Bālakāṇḍa

As the name suggests, it describes how the prince Rāma and his brother- Lakṣmaṇa, Bharat, and Sātrughna, are born; how they are sent to Gurukul – the ancient Vedic school and how they learn various arts such as archery, politics, ethics, daily rituals, etc.

2. Ayodhyākāṇḍa

The plot of the second chapter is the city palace of Ayodhya, when the four princes return to their palace; Rāma is set to inherit the throne. He also gets married to Sīta by breaking Shiva’s bow. But due to the envy of Kaikeyi, the royal maid, Ram is made to relinquish his title and go to exile with his wife and brother Lakṣmaṇa.

3. Aranyakāṇḍa

It describes Rāma’s early exile years in the forest and eventually during which many important events take place displaying the righteousness and courage of Rāma, Sīta, and Lakṣmaṇa. The chapter culminates with the abduction of Sīta by Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā.

4. Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa

The story progresses in the forest called Kiṣkindhā in southern India where Rāma meets his devoted allies like Hanumāna, Sugrīva, and Jāmvanta. The plan to bring back Sīta is set.

5. Sunderkāṇḍa

It describes Rāma's journey to Lañkā, It is sunder or beautiful in terms of lyrics, the praise of Hanuman and his army, and the joy of Sīta. It is also recited today in India in isolation from *Rāmāyaṇa*.

6. Yuddhakāṇḍa

As the name suggests, it describes how the story culminates in a war between Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's army. Eventually, Rāvaṇa is killed and Sīta is rescued.

7. Uttarakāṇḍa

The last chapter is on the life of Rāma having returned to Ayodhyā after exile. It also includes the banishment of Sīta, the birth of two sons, Lava and Kusá, absorption of Sīta in the holy Earth, and the ascent of Rāma to the Heaven.

Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

1- *Rasas*

Rasa means the sense of joy that arises when one encounters an epic or any piece of art and literature. These are the seat of emotions in the human soul. The *pradhāna rasa* (primary emotion) of *Rāmāyaṇa* is *karuṇa rasa* (grief and compassion). This epic begins and dissolves in the same *rasa*. *Śringāra rasa* (romance) is seen in union, separation, and reunion of Rāma and Sīta. *Vīra rasa* (courage) is also exhibited mainly in the Yuddhakanda. *Hāsyā rasa* is evident as in the case of Śurpanakhā. *Raudra* (fury) is also seen in Rāvaṇa, *adbhuta* (extraordinary) in Hanumāna, and *sānta* (peace) in the characters of many sages.

2- *Characters of Morality*

In this Epic, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kausālyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal

faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmana, the ideal brother, and Sīta the ideal wife.

3- Human-centric

In *Rāmāyaṇa* the divine attributes are situated in human form. The divine here descends in the characters who are normal people of a kingdom. It shows that the divine qualities can be imbibed by human beings also. Such an approach of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is unparalleled in the history of Sanskrit literature. Thus, the spirit of *Rāmāyaṇa* has a humanist dimension as well.

4- *Puruṣārtha* and *Āśrama*

Puruṣārtha is the central notion of Indian philosophy and morality. Etymologically, it is derived from the two Sanskrit words, *puruṣa* and *artha*, meaning the purpose of human beings. They are four as *dharma* (righteousness or duty), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (sensuous fulfillment), and *Mokṣa* (liberation). The epic does not eulogize *artha* and *kāma* but it does not dismiss it as well. They are suggested to be fulfilled within the limits of *dharma*. The primary importance is given to the *dharma* aspect as epitomized in the character of Rāma, Hanumāna, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa. *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts the victory of *dharma* over *adharma*. The epic does not describe much about *Mokṣa* but again does not dismiss its importance.

Āśramas are also the founding pillars of *Sanātana dharma*. Though all the *āśramas* are described in the epic but the central focus has been on the *gṛhastha āśrama dharma* which we find in Rāma's management of his kingdom and family affairs.

5- Metaphoric Suggestions

Besides moral and aesthetic importance, saints and philosophers down the ages have tried to derive a suggested meaning (metaphor) of the story of *Rāmāyaṇa*. For instance, Vivekananda interprets it in an Advaitic sense where Rāma is seen as the Supreme *Brahman*, Sīta is seen as *jīvātmā* (the individual soul), and Laṅkā is illustrated as a human body. The *jivatma* which is encaged in the body of Laṅkā always desires to meet her Supreme Lord (*Brahman*). The only hindrance is that of *rākṣasas* or our evil character traits. Vibhīṣaṇa represents the *sattva guṇa* (auspicious qualities), Rāvaṇa represents the *rajoguṇa* or our ego, and Kumbhakarāṇa represents the *tamoguṇa* or the inertia. Hanumāna is seen as the guru or the vital force of *jīva* by which the

soul remembers God and God in turn comes and saves the *jīvātman* by killing the ego of Rāvaṇa.

2. *The Mahābhārata*

The second great epic (*Mahākāvya*) after the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Mahābhārata*, which literally denotes a battle name that took place in Kurukṣetra some 5000 years ago. If the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *adi kāvya* of Sanskrit then *Mahābhārata* is the first historical epic (*itihāsa kāvya*) of India. According to ‘The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism’, the *Mahābhārata* is the longest epic or text in the history of mankind. It contains over one lakh *ślokas* (verses) and over 1.8 million words and is roughly ten times the length of *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. Scholars like WJ Johnson have also compared it with the Bible, the Quran and the works of Homer and Shakespeare. In Indian tradition, it is also called the fifth *Veda* or *viśva kośa* (the treasure of world knowledge).

Texture of the *Mahābhārata*

As stated above, the *Mahābhārata* consists of over one lakh *ślokas*. It was composed by Vyasa with the help of god Gaṇeśā. In its chapters, it contains stories within stories. Further, it is composed of 18 *parvas* (books) and then further sub-*parvas* (or sub-chapters), viz., as follows:

1. **Ādi Parva** – As the name suggests, it delineates the origin of the *Mahābhārata*, the race of Bharat, and Bhṛgu.
2. **Sabhā Parva** – It depicts the life of the court of Indraprastha, the *yajña* (sacrifice) of Yudhiṣṭhira, the game of dice, disrobing of Draupadī and the exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
3. **Vana Parva** – It describes the twelve years of exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
4. **Virāṭa Parva** – It describes the incognito lives of the Pāṇḍavas at the court of Virāṭa.
5. **Udyoga Parva** – ‘*Ugdyoga*’ means efforts and here it signifies the attempts and efforts made to avoid war between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.
6. **Bhīṣma Parva** – Herein commences the great battle and it describes the heroic performance of

Bhīṣma in the battlefield and eventually his fall on the bed of arrows. This *parva* also contains the world famous *Bhagavad-Gīta* - the Song of the Lord.

7. **Droṇa Parva** – It describes the performance and death of Droṇācārya at the battlefield including other martyrs.
8. **Karṇa Parva** – It describes the heroic performance of Karṇa, the son of Kuntī.
9. **Sālyā Parva** – It depicts the last day of the battle as Sālyā being the Commander in chief. It also described the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana which ended the war.
10. **Sauptika Parva** – It describes how Asvathāmā, Kṛpā, and Kṛtavarmā kill the remaining Pāṇḍava's army during their sleep leaving only seven warriors on the Pāṇḍavas and three on the side of Kauravas.
11. **Strī Parva** – It depicts the lamenting of Gāndhāri who curses Kṛṣṇa for the destruction of Kauravas.
12. **Sānti Parva** – It depicts the coronation of Bhīṣma.
13. **Anusāsana Parva** – It includes the final commands or instructions (*anusāsana*) given to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma.
14. **Asvamedhika Parva** – It describes the *asvamedha* yajña of Yudhiṣṭhira, the conquests of Arjuna and the speech of Anu-*Gīta* by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna.
15. **Āśramavāsika Parva** – It describes the death of Dhritarashtra, Kunti, and Gandhari in a Himalayan hermitage.
16. **Mausala Parva** – It describes the materialization of Gāndhāri's curse with the destruction of Kṛṣṇa's race of Yādavas/Yaduvansā.
17. **Mahāprasthānika Parva** – It describes the great journey of the Padavas and Draupadi towards the Himalayas.
18. **Svargārohaṇa Parva** – It describes the ultimate ascent of the Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven).

In addition to these 18 parvas, there is a chapter named Harivaṁsa Parva as an appendage, which describes the life of Kṛṣṇa, not covering the eighteen chapters.

Philosophical Underpinning of the *Mahābhārata*

Again, *Mahābhārata* is not just a story for a recreational purpose; rather it is a great narrative or epic on fundamental philosophical issues of *Sanātana Dharma*. Some of the philosophical foundations can be explained as follows:

1- *Puruṣārtha*

The meaning and importance of *Puruṣārtha* has been already stated above. The *Mahābhārata* also portrays characters who exhibit excellence in *Puruṣārtha*, for instance, in the life Karṇa, Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, Bhīṣma, etc. Yudhiṣṭhira is also portrayed as dharmarāja, i.e., the king (guardian) of Dharma. The ascent of Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven) highlights the importance of *Mokṣa* as the final aim of life.

2- Law of *Karma*

Numerous stories of the *Mahābhārata* also illustrate the importance and efficacy of the law of Karma, which simply says what is sowed, is reaped. It is the application of causality in the realm of action. For instance, Duryodhana and Kauravas have to pay for their wrong deed of disrobing Draupadi in the battlefield and when Bhīma kills Duryodhana. Great *ācāryas* also, who take the side of immorality, like Bhīṣma, also had to pay as per their *karma*. The law of Karma also supervenes the god-head authorities such as Kṛṣṇa who is cursed by Gāndhāri and eventually his race of Yadavas is devastated. Thus, the law of karma is the sole regulator of the entire narrative of the *Mahābhārata*.

3- The *Bhagavad-Gīta* and its Philosophy

The full-fledged philosophy of the times of the *Mahābhārata* is encapsulated in the *Bhagavad-Gīta* or the song of the Lord dispensed to Arjuna in the battlefield in the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahābhārata*. It is composed of 700 verses divided into eighteen chapters.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the major scriptures of Vedānta, and all its seeds can be found in it. For instance, Adī Sāṃkarācārya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaiṣṇavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak derive the importance

of *niskāma karma* (selfless action) from it. Some scholars like Gandhi and Vivekananda have derived the philosophy of *samanvaya yoga* from it, i.e., the path of harmony of action driven by pure knowledge and surrender to God.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* also institutionalizes the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*. When Arjuna is reluctant to fight in the battlefield or was inclined to take the path renunciation, Kṛṣṇa teaches him the path action rather than renunciation. The path of renunciation was contrary to his *svadharma* (intrinsic nature) as he was a warrior (*kṣatriya*). Kṛṣṇa emphatically says that to die in one's *svadharma* is greater than to live with the *dharma* of someone else.

Hence, the *Bhagavad-Gīta* presents a synoptic picture of the philosophy of *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and *Purāṇas* through the words of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

4- Metaphoric Suggestions

Philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi have contended that the battle of *Mahābhārata* never took place historically. It is merely an allegory given by Vyasa who wanted to preach certain core messages of Hinduism, like self-less action based on *varṇa* and *āśrama* systems. For Gandhi, the *Mahābhārata* is the state of mind of each and every individual. Kauravas are the negative forces and Pāṇḍavas the *sātvic* (positive) forces. The chariot of Kṛṣṇa also symbolizes the human condition where Arjuna is the *jīvātmana*, horses are the *indriyas* (sense organs) and Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer is the Supreme Lord. The state of dilemma posed by Arjuna is the state of mind of every individual and the path of happiness is following one's *svadharma*. Gandhi, however, also emphasized the futility of violence as the war of the *Mahābhārata* did not bring peace but only remorse and regret. However, at the same time he adores the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa as wisdom and deeply appreciated the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. In his own words-

“The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. However, that peace and joy come not to a skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind.”

14.4 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE

Philosophy of Epics (*Mahākāvya*) and the Indian culture and life are intimately connected. People might not be well versed in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* in scholastic terms yet their life's basic principles reflect the philosophical teachings of these epics. Often the epics like *Rāmāyaṇa* have been reformulated into vernacular languages. One such example is Tulsīdās's *Rāmacaritamānasa* which have moved the hearts and sentiments of millions of people. The following is a summative account of the philosophical response and the influences of the two great epics of India:

1- Genesis of Epic (*Mahākāvya*)

Scholars have deciphered the genesis of epics in *karuṇa rasa* (compassion and piety). For instance, when Vālmīki saw the death of a bird while it was engaged in love and the subsequent lamenting of the alive bird, his heart was filled with compassion and grief. He spontaneously uttered a verse which was lyrical, metrical, and full of poetic skills. Afterwards, Brahmā himself suggested him to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* – as the first epic. Hence, a great poetry is sprouted only in a certain state of agony, as Valmiki himself says – ‘*sōkaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ*’. Kālidāsa has also accepted this view when he says, ‘*yasya sōkaḥ śloka-tvamāpadyata*’.

2- The quest for Beatifism/Bliss

Another purpose of the epics, as already stated, is to evoke certain *rasas* in human beings. Epics or Indian philosophy in general are teleological in nature where it seeks the highest spiritual pleasure and a permanent release from suffering. In this respect, epics begin with the primary *rasas* such *karuṇa*, *vātsalya*, *śringāra*, etc. but it can also culminate in the highest pleasures like *bhāgavada ānanda* through the path of *bhakti*. *Rasa* are, therefore, also called *brahmānanda sahodara* (the twin of the Supreme Bliss).

3- *Varṇāśrama* and *Purushartha*

The epics have also supported unanimously a social structure based on *varṇa*, viz., *Brāhmin*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *sūdra*; and on *āśrama*, viz., *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsa*. These are the important constituents and stages of a normal human life. Furthermore, during these stages, what one has to achieve is nothing but the four ends of human beings –

puruṣārtha, viz., *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*. These elements have shaped the course of Indian philosophy, for instance, as in Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta philosophy.

4- *Dharma and Adharma*

Another core message of the epics is to proclaim the victory of morality (*dharma*) over immorality (*adharma*), and thereby preaching humanity to adhere to the course of *dharma* only; the epics unanimously proclaim *yato dharmah tato jaya*, i.e., where there is *dharma*, there is victory. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, this is observed when Rāma kills Rāvaṇa and with the coronation of Rāma and Vibhīṣaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, the same trend is observed with the victory of Pāṇḍavas over Kaurava and with the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira.

5- The *Bhagavad-Gīta* and its Influence on Indian Philosophy

In praise of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, a German philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt once quoted, “The most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue ... perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show.” The same is true regarding its influence in Indian philosophy in general and Vedānta in particular. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the *prasthāna trayi* (three great sources) of Vedānta. All the schools of Vedānta, be it *kevalādvaita* of Śaṅkara, *viśiṣṭādvaita* of Rāmānuja, or *dvaita* of Madhva, all claim their systems to be faithfully derived from the *Bhagavad-Gīta*.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Comment on the characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as moral ideals.

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2. Describe briefly the philosophy of *Bhagavad Gīta*.

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14.5 LET US SUM UP

We have observed how Indian *kāvya* culminated in the *Mahākāvya* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. We have also seen how they both are grand and heroic not only in terms of its volume and poetic qualities but also regarding its philosophical texture. *Rāmāyaṇa* has one protagonist, i.e., Rāma but *Mahābhārata* has many like Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and Yudhiṣṭhira. However, all of them portray an ideal character such as having courage, wisdom, devotion, etc. Ultimately, there turns out to be a victory of *dharma* over *adharmā*. The chief significance of the epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* lies in the sense that it propagates the deep, abstract and sometimes harsh truth of philosophy as sugarcoated by poetry which is easily accessible to and imbibed by a common person.

14.6 KEY WORDS

Kāvya : Poetry in ancient India with highly Sanskrit literary skills.

Mahākāvya : Great poetry of ancient India with great Sanskrit skills and voluminous in size.

Chanda/Chhanda : It is a kind of quatrain (four stanza) used in the poetic tradition of ancient India.

Rasa : Rasa is a kind joy or sense of beauty evoked by encountering any piece of art or literature.

Beatifism : The view that maximizing spiritual pleasure/happiness is the supreme goal of life.

Vedānta : It represents the teaching based on *prasthāntraya*, the three great sources (texts), namely, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, and the *Brahmasūtra*.

Teleology : Explanation of a thing based on *telos*, i.e., purpose or end.

Puruṣārtha : It means the virtues or duties of human beings. They are four- *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasures), and *Mokṣa* (liberation).

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14.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1) The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. *Kāvya* is the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke a certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. *Kāvya*, in its grand form, is called *Mahākāvya* and it has characteristics as it should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*asīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdesātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.

2) *Kāvya*s in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of the Ṛgveda. Uṣā Sūkta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kavyas* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki and the *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on, the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Maagha, Sriharsha, etc.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) The term '*Rāmāyaṇa*' comes from the two Sanskrit words – '*rama*' and '*ayana*' meaning the path or the place of Rāma. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kausālyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother, and Sītā the ideal wife.
- 2) The *Bhagavad-Gīta* encapsulates the philosophy of the times of *Mahābhārata*. It has the philosophy of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti yoga*. Adi Shankaracharya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaishnavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak have derived the importance of *niskāma karma* (selfless action) from it. It also contains the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*.