

DHARMA AND MOKSA

Usually, dharma is derived from the original concept or root 'rta' which stands for the cosmic law that upholds the world together ; and dharma is held to be the law inherent in all things and beings, each according to its nature. Indeed , if we are interested in the fortunes of the meaning of this word 'dharma', it should prove quite a mine of speculative or imaginative thinking. It is equally clear that this dharma concept has been adopted by certain major schools, interpreting it according to their respective metaphysics or ethics. In many minds, this dharma has remained as an ethical concept, but it has an a-ethical import also.

If it is argued that dharma means what rta stands for, and also the law inherent in all things and beings, conferring to each its individual law (whatever this might mean), then moksa is a going beyond all region of law into the realm of freedom from all conditions and limitations. Here , again , there is an abstract way of interpreting the term, for going beyond or transcending all dharma is the negation of all dharma or conditions or law, including even self-law or self-regulation. Another interpretation is the concrete sense of controlling all beings and things by the principle inherent in each and every one of them. Thus, to know the law and to act accordingly is to be their usability. This is the concept of a *dharma-siddha*, one who is the master of all *dharmas* and, as such, sovereign over all.

However, this is not accepted, because the whole nature is a world of perpetual change and is under the law of the law of life and death. And all the mastery over the sciences (law of dharma) of things and beings is of no avail in the field of real experience or in freedom from the bodily existence experienced in death.

It is not the laws of things that are considered to be dharma , but the proper technique of using the laws for surpassing the limitations of things on one's freedom that is dharma. This is the naturalistic explanation. However, this naturalistic interpretation of dharma yielded place to the moral or ethical necessity of distinguishing inhuman acts the welfare and ill-fare of man and his society, and a new concept of moral or ethical rightness became included under 'form' or 'law' equally universal in

the fields of ethical life or human conduct as the laws of nature are in the fields of natural life and beings.

Actions became distinguished as lawful or unlawful, and *karma* became distinguished as *dharmai* or *adharma* in a general sense. The first view of *karma* is action, which the general term for all actions, including *dharma* because it cannot violate the universal law. It is only at the level of the human being, or generally life, that the freedom to go wrong or move away from the ultimate law seems to develop. This experience of the freedom to err or to commit error in all life, and of the capacity to learn, leads to what in ethical life has been the fruitful source of the growing awareness that all action is not to be considered to be included in the concept of *dharma*. Earlier thus, *karma* meant sacrificial activities known as *Sharma* since sacrifices themselves were voluntary activities chosen for growing in to the worlds Reality and light and delight (*svargakamo yajeta*). The whole of creation, however was likened to a great rite (*kratu karma*), which was based on the im-mixture of the two concepts of *rta* and individual rite performance. *Karma*, restricted to the performance of Vedic sacrifices and such duties as are necessary for each individual in that scheme of ritual hierarchy, had to be performed for the sake of *loka-sangraha*, or world welfare. Thus was included the ethical concept of duty with the cosmic function of order. It is wrong to consider that *rta* is an act of creation or *pravrtti*; nor is it a concept enfolding the process of *nivrtti*, though both these connotations seem to have played their part in the development or evolution of this concept.

All creation, according to later thinkers, is *pravrtti* of the *Prakrti*; even the Purusa-sukta hymn (hymn of Creation) is interpreted creationistic ally (as *dharma pravrtti*). The *nivrtti-dharma* is thus distinguished from the *pravrtti-dharm*, though it will be patent that here *dharma* is used in a comprehensive way to suggest the right way of living in the creative process, as also the right way of living in the evaluative process (*laya*). These several meanings have inter-crossed and have led to a series of confusions.

However, we see that *pravrtti-dharma* invariably has been suggested as leading to the gradual growth of ignorance and sloth and to the failure of consciousness itself. The duties of each individual, and those pertaining to each caste member, irrespective of pain or pleasure, gain or loss honour or dishonour, produce results for the betterment of the social order. The organic unity of the state or society depends on this basic performance of duty by every member, irrespective of fruits. This is the meaning of the disinterestedness of mind in the performance of duties. Obviously, there are other duties not covered by these lists of duties (*kartavya karma*). There has hardly been any counsel to give up these. The performance of sacrificial duties, as well as individual functional and relational duties to the hierarchy of the universe, is absolutely for the realization of true emancipation (*moksa*) from the bondage of births and rebirths. The *punya* and *papa* concepts have both a restricted sense and a wider meaning as including happiness or reward or denying them.

The ancient held that dharma itself leads to moksa, in the sense of leading one to liberation from the bonds of rebirths or the chain of continuous births and deaths or transmigration. Transcendence of human life seems to have been the one definite aim which the *karma-yoga* or performance of *karma* (*yajna*) is said to lead to. Of course, it was later held to lead only on to the purification of the entire psychic being, which liberates the consciousness from its thralldom to sensory life and desires connected with it. The positive explanation of this kind of life is said to be the *sthita-prajnata* established in the inner self. This is the negation of all activity that tends to preserve the present state or produce the future states. This is said to be the arising of *jnana* or *bodhi*. When once *karma* and *dharma* get opposed to each other, it is clear that the *cakra* or wheel of the former is the reverse of the latter; the former becomes *adharmacakra*, and the latter *dharma-chakra*; the former leads to rebirth etc., and the latter to emancipation.

Jana-yoga is, of course, the *dharma* of the soul that has sought transcendence over life's fitful fever. It is the perfection of knowledge, which realizes that activity, as such, is an outgrowth or overflow of a need outside oneself that leads to the cycle or chain of activities placed in relation to one another as causes and effects. It was realized

also that this chain is cyclical and not merely a continuous unilinear process or progress. In sense, though *jnana* itself is a kind of activity, it is a different kind of activity than that which is sought to be controlled and directed in *karma-yoga* through disinterestedness. Indeed, it can be shown that *karma* is a search for the completion of oneself in that which is not-self; as such, it is a kind of selfness. This is the basic metaphysics behind *jnana-yoga*. It may be pleaded that a combination of *karma and jnana* is available to all individuals in everything, and all that is needed to make them lead to moksa or liberation is to tie or yoke or center them in the Self, through detachment from the world of one's creation (not-self) and attachment to one's Self of God.

This however, is yet a long way off to the real *dharma* that liberates. It is *bhakti-yoga* that shows the way out of the impasse of conflict between the two *yogs of karma and jnana*, an impasse which the *jnana—karma—samuccaya—veda* or conjointment of action and knowledge cannot overcome. The devotional activity reaffirms the knowledge relation between the Absolute and the individual in the system of Reality, and proceeds to fulfill itself through the activity that refunds all the All or Absolute. Thus the edges of *karma* and *jnana*, the fear of being caught up in attachment, and the necessity to perform one's duties as long as one is here are removed. *Dharma* and moksa seems to be reconciled and realized. But we have almost said that *jnana* means moksa, for it seeks to free itself from all the limitations of terrestrial life. The means turns out to take the shape and fullness of form of the end itself. Surely, even *moksa* is a means, rather than an end, for freedom is for fuller being, rather than an end in itself. *Dharma* is really dharma, not only because it leads to moksa; and moksa is real moksa, only when it leads to the freedom in the being of the Absolute and the Absolute becomes the end of all means (*dharma-artha-kama-moksa*). Thus, it is basic to a proper understanding of Indian thought or idealism that we should clearly perceive that the so-called *purusathas* are of an instrumental nature, rather than of an intrinsic nature.

No wonder that a life *dharma* is a life of enlightenment amidst the life of ignorance. It has raised problems of most serious concern which the Dharmasastras have with luminous clarity tried to solve (even like the Republic of Plato in Ancient Greece); but the temporal malaise of modern thinkers has seen here a historical record, rather than

an idealism. Albeit the modern hedonistic or utilitarian egalitarianism or socialism has imposed the most heavy strain on human reason-it has become a continuous affair of discovery and politico-social law-making-it is an adventure without rider or compass, except the inward craving to realize the impossible unity of means and ends of incompatible nature. The realistic and pragmatic trends of the modern world, even its materialism, have all revealed the impossible idealism to be their end.

A fresh thinking about the means and ends would lead to a retiming of our premises. It does not mean a return to the past, but a return to a metaphysic of stable realizations or revaluations. Metaphysics got devalued in an empiricist age, which refused to recognize any metaphysics and contented itself with the pragmatic expedient of probabilities (mathematically scored) in exchange for certainties. We have begun to delight in uncertainties and to see in these a freedom which will please the adventurer and the yet unbeaten youth. However, new duties have lost all character of obligatoriness, and we rebel against all law or imposition of responsibility as being arbitrary and experimental.

The quest for certainty however does not mean loss of freedom. It is here that serious thinkers even of the world metaphysics or real metaphysics have perceived that freedom is a means and on end. All that the ancient thinkers claimed for freedom was something much more definite. It is union with the Highest; it is mergence it is mergence that does not entail a re-emergence-a return to the state of ignorance. The religious seer corrected the abstract concept of freedom by showing it to be real freedom-a freedom that does not lead to bondage, a freedom which at the beginning lead to the non-selling of the self, or to the identification of oneself with the instruments and objects of one's ignorance or activity.

The convergence between the Vedantas on this point is very clear. Śrī Sankara argues for the utter mergence in the Absolute without name and form as liberation; it is from that state that there is no return. Śrī Rāmānuja claims that it is certainly a union or sambandha, which is a most luminous relationship of sarira-saririn (body-soul)in or between oneself and God (considered as the absolute Self of all). Śrī Madhva holds that it

is the full enjoyment of inseparable service of God. No one who has attained this freedom can be thought of as being apart or different from the Whole or God or the Absolute. It is the non-return to the life of ignorance; it is a ligit in Knowledge. One's activities are within and for the Absolute, and not for oneself. It is this last point that leads to the concept of transcendent dharma, a dharma, a dharma for God, rather than for human society and man.

Ancient thinkers did not consider that service of man was the end and aim of life, but that service of man was the end aim of life, but that the service of God was the final aim of life. They experienced a freedom of that God-world and God, which is incomparable. All freedom here's, in a sense, a bondage to the negative; all dharma is a limitation of the free spirit of divine existence. It is true that the author of the Vedanta-Sutra himself speaks the voice of the liberated, when he declares that in all respects, except with regard to universal activities, the soul reaches equality with God (*jagad-vyapara varjam*); and this apparent the limitation of the soul as such.

Dharma and *moksa* are, however, dynamic concepts, and whilst they have a twofold play in the planes of all existence, there is a subtle change of places in the ascending series. Thus the dharma of a particular order becomes the moksa of lower order, and the moksa of a particular order becomes the dharma of a higher order, when it gains concreteness in its function as a member of that higher order. As such, there is undoubtedly a relativity and change of meaning in the terms themselves. It is significant that this principle is usually forgotten in the interpretation of the concepts. It is not a play of words as such. The ancients thought of two concepts like *rta* and held that one supports the other according to the actual plane and time of being.

The concept of dharma with the concept of *satya* has enfolded in its double stress the equal necessity of both preservation of order and its growth into a higher order. This organic conception yields a more fruitful appreciation of the Hindu view which reveals in the *varna-dharma* and *asrama-dharma* this play of the dynamic wealth the social. It leads to what has been known as the gradual growth into higher levels of awareness of the links with the ultimate *satya* of *satyasya satyam*. This means that a true

dharma plays a unique part in involving moksa as a dynamic principle of spiritual evolution; and without it, leads to what in recent times has been called the closed society. Further this dharma concept is not a horizontal or social organization of the whole world of humans, but a vertical ascent into planes of being above the human.

The Hindu thought thus reveals not dialectic of dharma and moksa as opposites; rather, it reveals the inward necessity of each to the other in a different sense, as fulfilling and supporting and evolving newer patterns of freedom and supporting and evolving newer patterns of freedom and newer patterns of dharma and moksa were, in a sense, envisaged by the ancient seers. They are not altogether new, though their descriptions are verily left to each individual seeker. Individual effort and dedication and evolution proceed up wordplay when the two are supporting and reinforcing each other, and not by playing the one against the other. The Hindu thought shows moksa as the superior Hindu thought shows moksa as the superior partner of the life of dharma, revealing itself as the continuous opening out and ascending élan of spiritual life in India. That which, on the other hand, seeks to reverse this ascent by pointing the descent on freedom is a doctrine of false pleasures and illusions of enjoyment and happiness, which is bound to squeeze out the life of growth.