

INTRODUCTION : PHILOSOPHY

There could be readers who know philosophy and have their own philosophy without a systematic knowledge about the meaning, scope, nature and history of philosophy. There could also be readers who have some idea about philosophy and yet they do not know what value philosophy has in the present day world. This introduction is written specially for those who have not undergone systematic courses in Philosophy at University but are intellectually quite rational and intuitively always aspiring towards better life through transformation of consciousness at a higher level. I have, therefore, tried to explain in brief the meaning, the philosophical enlightenment, philosophy as meta-science and worldview, philosophy in today's world and the value of philosophy. The scholars may please excuse me for finding this introduction too introductory for Philosophy.

What is philosophy:

The starting point of philosophy is 'Wonder' and wonder probably is as old as humanity. We all have such experiences of moments that often make us wonder. We are all philosophers on at least some occasions. We do work and function without wondering and embrace traditional or popular "prepackaged ideology," which provides ready made answers to fundamental questions. Both 'having' philosophy and 'doing' philosophy or 'philosophizing', though in contrast, are in search for insight and understanding. "In fact, philosophy could be understood as the

discipline that criticizes received opinions, in all subjects, from daily life to aesthetic and religious experience. In this sense philosophy is radical. Philosophers go to the “roots” of ideas by clarifying, questioning, and evaluating our most basic assumptions.” This very act of questioning and evaluating the assumptions can lead to views that are odd or uncomfortable to one’s culture. Lord Mahavira & Buddha challenged the Hindu views, in West, Socrates challenged the Athenians, the existentialists and philosophers of science questioned religious opinion. “Philosophy is, in short, a radical, critical inquiry into the fundamental assumptions of any field of inquiry, including itself.” Because of this business of continuing scrutiny and revision of all past solutions, philosophy never rests, never reaches the final answer.

Philosophy can be understood through some of the phrases quoted here below: Philosophy is

- a critical approach to all subjects.
 - a style of life, a life a ideas, or a life of reason.
 - is thinking, about everything and anything.
 - living thoughtfully.
 - a discipline that puts our lives and our beliefs in perspective.
 - a vision to justification, vision to consequences.
 - a discipline that gives us intellectual strength to defend what we do and what we believe.....
- and so on

Bertrand Russell in his article on the value of Philosophy says, “Philosophy like all other studies, aims preliminarily at knowledge. The knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of sciences”..... He concludes by stating that, “Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to the questions, but rather for the sake of questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our

conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculations, but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest goods."

Philosophical Enlightenment:

'A philosophical thinker is one who does not merely think and tries to answer the fundamental question but who has sought to rethink, with is revision and a renewed understanding, a critique - his way through 'the veritable jungle of thought' to elucidate philosophy at a higher level as a conceptual inquiry into the deeper questions which lie at the foundation or at the horizon of our thinking- leading to a higher level of enlightenment.'" What does this mean, precisely ? "It means", as Ash Gobar says, "to draw out the underlying issues from the unexamined regions of their dark origins, into the light of critical elucidation and interpretation. It means that philosophical thinking unveils hidden assumptions and discloses unforeseen consequences of our belief systems. It means - to use the expression of the ancient Greek thinkers - *legein ta legomena*, i.e. to lay out, in the light of reason, the essence and the meaning of our picture of the world." The philosophical inquiry be it elucidatory or creative, analytical or dialectical, the philosophical thinking behind it has the power of descending even deeper into the state of human consciousness, suggesting the critical reconstruction of the fundamental assumptions in the light of reason. Let me quote here an analogy from Plato, as quoted by Ash Gobar, to illustrate 'Philosophy as enlightenment.'

"In every case of vision — he observes in the Republic (VL:507) — there are three things involved: the object to be seen, the eye of the seer, and (what one is not conscious of in the act of seeing but takes for granted) the light of the sun providing the context of possible vision. Analogously, I say that the object of seeing corresponds to the world, the eye of the observer to the

arts and science, and the light of the sun to philosophy. For philosophy provides the context of intelligibility of our experience to the world; and, without it, our arts and sciences and other belief systems would remain eclipsed at their foundations and shrouded by darkness at their horizons.

Philosophy emerges as the illuminator of the deeper questions (and deeper truths) which lie buried in the context of our understanding."

Philosophy as 'Metascience' and as 'Worldview':

Philosophy is concerned with deeper questions and deeper truths. Philosophy, thus, asks only ground questions or horizons questions. It looks backward into the deepest assumption of our thinking, and it also looks forward into the farthest consequences of our thinking. In one case, philosophy emerges as 'metascience' (when it looks backward), in other case philosophy emerges as 'worldview' (when it looks forward). What is important here to note is that the objective and subjective approaches represent complementary aspects of 'philosophical enlightenment'.

Let us note what Wittgenstein observes. 'The word 'philosophy' must mean something which stands above or below, but not beside, the natural sciences.'² It gives transcendental image of 'philosophy'. Plato uses the phrase "perpetual search". These and many such symbolic expression reflect the transcendental image of 'philosophy'. As earlier we have seen philosophy is a deeper critical enquiry: questions. The main characteristics of philosophical questions are, firstly, they are conceptual, rather than being factual or linguistic and secondly, they are radical or transcendental. Both these taken together, distinguish philosophical questions. What is most important is to note that 'a philosopher' is a thinker who represents a certain level of 'higher consciousness'.

Philosophy as meta science (popularly known as metaphysics) is an inquiry into 'the epistemological framework and the ontological foundations' of the science. Philosophy as worldview inquires into the horizon of understanding, livery one of us, if we are reflective,

we form a picture of the world. But behind this picture lies the philosophical questions: How true is this, and, however true or false, what meaning does it have for one's own life? Philosophy as worldview is an attempt to understand - a tapestry of "reality" hand-woven by the psyche for the purposes of its life as it were. The philosophical thinking concerning the world involves a measure of 'higher consciousness' without which 'philosophy', as a transcendental inquiry, would be impossible, Ervin Laszlo explaining about "systems -philosophy" says, "The demand for 'seeing things whole' and seeing the world as an interconnected, interdependent, field or continuum, is in itself a healthy reaction to the loss of meaning entailed by our over-compartmentalized research and piecemeal analysis.... Failing in relevance to anything of human concern",³ Like the 'philosophical world view, equally important is also the "philosophy of life". Man can not live a meaningful and successful life without ideals and without dream. And the highest dream of man can be none other than his 'Philosophy of life'. Thus the philosophical worldview 'serves as the only reliable guide in the perilous journey we call life'. "In the absence of a philosophical worldview - a 'philosophy of life', the life of man would remain beset by fragmentation. It would remain shrouded by existential vacuum."⁴

Philosophy in West:

Ralph Waldo Emerson says , "Plato is philosophy, and philosophy is Plato... out of Plato comes all things that are still written and debated among men of thought." Philosophy in west starts from Greek Philosophy dating back to pre—Socratics, from the sixth century B.C. The most remarkable philosophers before Socrates, from whom the ancient Greek, philosophy emerged were Thales, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Anaximenes, Zeno, Heraclitus and Democritus. I do not wish to overload the introduction with a detailed report of every one's contribution. It is enough to note that these philosophers were mainly concerned with the physical world and their speculation revolved round the substance or substances which made up the world. Then we have three great

philosophers in the 5th, 4th & 3rd Century B.C., Socrates (469-399B.C) Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B. C.). Out of these three, Socrates defended his life the love of wisdom against the teachings of gods. He was a man who wrote not a single book, left not a scrap of written information for posterity and is known only at second hand through the writings of his contemporaries. Plato is generally recognised as the Father of Philosophy, 'the first systematic metaphysician and epistemologist, the first philosopher to set forth a comprehensive treatment of the entire domain of philosophy from ontology to ethics and aesthetics.' Aristotle was a teacher of Alexander the Great, but he was a student in Plato's Academy for twenty years. He is consider the most important philosopher in the Western tradition. The Father of Logic, a great biologist and physicist, writer of a great work on ethics and great work on political philosophy. He is known for his significant contributions to every area of philosophy,

Philosophy in West, during the Medieval period was a combination of Philosophy and Theology. But then the thirst for discovery was in the era 17th century onwards. The names of Machiavelli and Erasmus, synonymous with this period are Da Vinci and Copernicus. The modern period in West can only be justifiably understood in the background of Revolutions - The Russian Revolution, The French Revolution, The Industrial Revolution, and most important The Revolution in Science. Not only Europe but the entire West was a place under a great change. Along with Revolutions came a great social and political change which led to major changes in Western culture and thinking. For the enhancement of our understanding of life, to ennoble our minds and to make our hearts better' philosophy, in West, enjoys a very respectable status.

Philosophy in East:

Restricting to India and Indian Philosophy, we can say that like West, in East philosophy has a long tradition from Ancient times till modern times. Even then, certain remarkable characteristics are seen in Indian or Eastern philosophy. Religion plays a central

role in the history of Eastern Philosophy. In Eastern civilizations religion and philosophy are almost indistinguishable. The teachings of Lord Krishna (Vedas & Bhagwad Gita), Lord Mahavira (the Canonical literature of the Jainas), Siddhartha the Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tzu - they all contain a vast area of philosophy. Ancient Indian Philosophy is remarkably rich in its Metaphysics, Logic, Aesthetics and Mathematics. The Moral Philosophy of Eastern philosophy and religion, its axioms and doctrines, along with the question of God, nature of God and God as the creator and moral governor of the universe provide an insight into immense variety and profound thought. Moreover, as we have seen 'Reason' being at the centre in West, Philosophy is all speculative, argumentative and analytical. In East, specially in India, 'Religion' being at the centre, philosophy is Vision (Darshan) - an insight into Life. Philosophy is Life oriented; intuition and not intellect is what we find as dominant. In East, philosophy is a compilation of many schools and systems. Each is unique in its precise contribution and rich in its literature. It is worth noting that in Indian Philosophy, though we have Religion and God at the centre, we have also the Religions and Systems not believing in God. There are Theistic and Atheistic (the carvarkas) schools. But we have 'religious - atheism' - a unique quality for the west. The philosophy of East is rich in its Metaphysics (*Tatva Mimansa*), Epistemology (*Jananamimansa*) and in its Philosophy of Soul. The ultimate goal of Life being liberation (*Moksa*) it is the Soul that liberates. This leads to the exposition of a very deep and scientific Law of Karma. The philosophy in East- since ancient period to modern period - has greatly affected its culture and social life. The most remarkable thing in the Modern era is growing consciousness for value oriented life. Apart from quest for peace and Beauty, there is a lot about transformation of Consciousness through Yoga and Meditation. The concept of universal peace and brotherhood, the need for art of living and living together, and the values emerging out from Truth, Beauty and Goodness is worth noting proudly.

Philosophy Today:

“The discipline of Philosophy was never under more threat than it is today”. The progress of science in providing comforts and ease has taken away from philosophy which was regarded as its rightful territory. In the present times many philosophers ridiculed their own discipline. The materialism, the utilitarianism and the short cut pragmatic way of life took away people from thinking and thoughts. The terrorism, religious and political fundamentalism and extreme materialism pose a big challenge to today's world.

Yet philosophy is more popular now than it has ever been. This is so, perhaps, because ‘philosophy is emerging out of the shackles of professionalism under which it sought protection from science and other disciplines for the last two centuries.’ There is a growing demand of the understanding of Life and its different dimensions including the spiritual aspect of life, there is a growing appreciation of religion and philosophy and there is an incessant quest for ultimate values like Peace, Bliss, Love etc. The celebration of Reason and Rationality along with Philosophy and Religion, not as opposites but as complementary to each other has been culminating into a post modern era.

The meaning, scope, nature and history of philosophy give us a profound and more powerful perception of the development of human thought and better life. Above all, philosophy continues and will ever keep continuing in providing what it has always been renowned for, a special kind of Love for Wisdom.

References :

1. Ash Gobar, "Philosophy as Higher Enlightenment"
2. Ibid - P.267
4. Ibid - P. 268
5. Ibid - P.10 & 11

“The function of life is to live. The basic incentive of organic becoming is the struggle for survival. It goes on throughout the long process of biological evolution, until in man it becomes the conscious urge for freedom—the supreme human value. The beginning of man’s endless struggle for freedom lies in the animal struggle for survival. Everything that man has done, every one of his acts, cultural progress, scientific achievements, artistic creation—everything has been motivated by that one urge. Man is finite, while the Universe is infinite, and his environment, in the last analysis, is the whole Universe. Consequently, his struggle for freedom is eternal; he can never conquer the Universe. Therefore; the urge for-freedom is the only eternal thing in the human world. This urge enables man to acquire knowledge; he conquers his environment by knowing.”

From “New Orientation” - 1946

By : Sri M.N. Roy