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Vedic Philosophy of Creation and the Prevalent Ideologies

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Abstract: A simple man-made object such as a wooden table is treated as an effect. Its causes are: a log of wood, a carpenter, set of tools, karma, space and time. Also, the carpenter must be convinced that a potential end-user of the wooden table exists for whom he decides to make the table. Similar approach is applied to the creation. It leads to the Vedic philosophy with the well-known trilogy of God, soul and matter as the three primary entities in the world that are eternal, i.e. neither they have the beginning nor the end.

Prevalent ideologies are explained based on the overemphasis of one or more of the above causes, while near-neglecting the others. A better understanding of the Vedic philosophy is the need of the hour. This can bridge the gap among seemingly different and even divergent ideologies. This approach can form the basis for a more productive and useful interfaith dialogue. People following different ideologies probably end up with conflicts and wars for imaginary differences as it happened with the six blind people in the proverbial story, bent upon describing an elephant in six different ways. The number six is relevant here for two reasons: 1) the causes for the wooden table number six, and 2) there are six books of Vedic philosophy called upāṅga.

INTRODUCTION:

Law of causation is the most basic, axiomatic and primitive law known to mankind. It simply states that an effect is preceded by a cause. If it is raining then there must be clouds up in the sky. If we see a child then we are definite about his mother and father. Any philosophy must describe the events
seen in the world in a rational, logical and consistent manner. We will see that the Vedic philosophy is of such a nature, and indeed, it encompasses other prevalent ideologies. So much so that one of the six books of Vedic philosophy, Nyaya-Darśana by Gautama develops the logical basis for any fruitful discussion.

In the following paragraphs, the law of causation is applied to a simple man-made object such as a wooden table. Six basic elements will emerge from this treatment. It will then be pointed out that the six books of Vedic philosophy cover one such basic element each. The developed ideas would then be applied to the creation to understand the Vedic philosophy of creation. Vedic philosophy is based on the trilogy of God, soul and matter. The opportunity will be taken to highlight that one or two elements missing from the trilogy does not lead to a plausible philosophy.

It will be then pointed out that the Vedic philosophy is holistic and all-encompassing. It will be shown that the prevalent ideologies are based on a subset of the six basic elements. Sometimes an ideology overemphasizes one basic element to a great extent giving an impression that the other basic elements have been disregarded or even altogether discarded. This leads to a popular thinking among people that one ideology is radically different from the other ones. Thus, the ideologies sometimes tend to divide people by acting as a divisive force. Eventually, the divisive tendencies may even give rise to conflicts and wars causing much distress and sufferings to a huge population.

The present paper attempts to establish that the Vedic philosophy includes all the elements that the prevalent ideologies are based upon in so far as they are reasonable ideologies. Therefore, a serious study of the Vedic philosophy is highly desirable to appreciate how it can act as a catalyst to unify different schools of thought and their followers. With some open-mindedness and consequent deeper understanding on part of the people, it can certainly act as a strong unifying force.

Towards the end, remarks are made about the divisive forces in medieval India, which played havoc over the Vedic philosophy itself, to the extent that out of the six books of Vedic philosophy, each one looked at the other schools as one following a different philosophy. They ignored the fact that the six books were called upśuṣka of the Vedas, certainly elaborating one and the same Vedic philosophy. Thus, the very Vedic philosophy, which is a strong binding force became divided into six schools where each looked at the others as different from itself. This was a period of Dark Age in India characterized by deep divisions among the people based on caste. The divisive tendencies further tore apart the fabric of Indian society by casting its dark shadow even on the learned people who had specialized on one or another book of the Vedic philosophy. The plight came to be represented by the proverbial story of six blind men bent upon describing an elephant in his own narrow way, and who then even begin to quarrel among themselves because each description differs from the others' though it pertained to the same elephant.

The conclusion is that Vedic philosophy should be given wide publicity among one and all, in a form that makes it the basis of a fruitful interfaith dialogue leading to better understanding among all sections of human society.

**LAW OF CAUSATION:**

In simple terms, every effect has one or more causes. Only the requisite cause(s) can lead to a particular effect. For example, if it rains only if there are clouds up in the sky. There may be clouds without rain too, but if it's raining then there must be at least one cloud. Similarly, we know that a child is born by a woman who became pregnant with a man's sperm. Thus, when we see any human being, we are sure of existence of his mother and father. The law of causation, or the law of cause and effect is the most basic, axiomatic and primitive law known to mankind, almost instinctively. Every moment we function with an implicit faith in this law. Any philosophy must give due consideration to this law, and indeed, must be fully consistent with it, as the Vedic philosophy is.

Vedic philosophers have treated a man-made object such as an earthen pot, called gātra, in great detail to develop a framework of the Vedic philosophy. Obviously, man is most comfortable in analyzing a man-made object whose existence takes place within his control. We will continue our discussion using a wooden table as the object of our inquiry, which is a similar man-made object. A wooden table is an effect because it is not a beginning-less thing. It came into being at a certain moment of time. Thus, it is a valid question to ask, what are the causes responsible for its existence. A log of wood is definitely a cause without which a table couldn't be made - called the material cause. We know that a log of wood doesn't transform itself to become a table; a carpenter must act on it - called the agental cause or the efficient cause. Furthermore, the carpenter must use some tools - called ordinary causes. He must perform work, called karma. Also, space and time are definitely required. Thus, we see that a simple man-made object of the wooden table has six causes responsible for its existence: wood, carpenter, tools, karma, space and time - six basic elements.

Strictly speaking, these six causes are not fully adequate for the table's existence. The carpenter can make the table given the adequacy of all the remaining five causes. But before he sets out on making the table, he must have adequate reason to make the same, which of course, he is capable of making. Particularly, he must be sure that some one will use the table one way or another. If there is no potential end-user then no carpenter will set out to make the table. Thus, existence of a potential end-user is necessary for the carpenter to set out to make the table.

Let us closely examine three of the above causes, namely the wood, carpenter and end-user. The log of wood doesn't exist once it has been transformed into the table, while the carpenter and end-user continue to exist the way they existed prior to the transformation. As we see, the carpenter and end-user are conscious beings. Indeed, only a conscious being can be a knower, enjoyer and doer (jñāti, bhokti and karoti). The carpenter, in the present case, must have the requisite knowl-
edge to make the table, and also, he must perform the karma to make the same (knower and doer) while the end-user can enjoy the table only if he is a conscious being (enjoyer).

Vedic philosophers applied these observations to the creation, which was treated as an effect. They concluded that there must be three eternal entities for the creation to come into existence, namely God, soul and matter. The statement that the carpenter made the table out of wood for an end-user has its parallel that God created the universe out of matter for the souls. While all the three entities exist by very nature, the latter two are intrinsically conscious too. Additionally, God is said to be intrinsically in pure bliss — this is clearly stated in the Vedas. This is represented by the well-known hierarchy of matter (sat), soul (sat and cit) and God (sat cit and ananda) giving rise to the well-known compound word saccidānanda for God. It is easy to appreciate that the trilogy of God, soul and matter is the minimum set of elements to describe the creation in a plausible manner. For example, if God is missing then who can be the maker of the infinitely great and grand universe — no soul can do so, individually or collectively. If matter is absent then the immediate question arises — what is the universe made of. What are the things that we enjoy in the world made of? If the souls are absent then the question will arise for whom did God make the creation — He doesn’t need to do it for His own sake because He is in permanent bliss. Similarly, if matter is the only entity (i.e. God and soul, two entities are absent) then how could it transform itself into so many things, being void of intelligence? If souls alone were present then what will they make anything out of as they have finite capacities and knowledge that cannot give rise to the intricate and grand universe that we see. If God alone exists then the question would arise for whom is the creation, and it is made out of what?

PRESENT IDEOLOGIES — AN OVERVIEW:

Modem Scientists: Let us consider the modern material scientists first. Some of them tend to ignore God and soul, thinking that matter alone exists in the universe — the material cause in the Vedic philosophy. But then it is not easy to explain our consciousness — what makes us feel pleasure and pain, and our related emotions. Even our typical states in a day, particularly the deep sleep in the night becomes difficult to explain when the body is alive and functioning but is unconscious. Death is an irreversible event and that should not happen if we were void of soul; it should be possible to make a dead person alive like a machine is brought back to the working condition after it gets out of order. These are not merely academic issues but have a profound effect on the way human society functions. As an individual, one grows to become an adult person disconnected from the cosmic father and mother. Indeed, this gives rise to a society where people are as if they have been brought up in an orphanage without access to their mother and father. As one would expect, such grown up people will not be very normal human beings because they haven’t received pure love from their parents and haven’t learnt to reciprocate the same to their parents — probably, the most important lesson in the life. Furthermore, without God we lose track of a unifying and binding force that could unite the entire humanity. We become incapable of realizing that the entire humanity is one family; we all are the children of one and the same God. It is seen that such scientists tend to live in a make believe world, where they appreciate the beauty of the great art that this world is, without appreciating the Most Beautiful Artist. They lose the real charm of the life without knowing about it and purely due to their own making.

Tvaṁ hi nāh pitā vasya tvaṁ mātā uaktakrto bahuvātha
Adhā te sumamāme (ャ 8.98.11)

Capitalism: The system of capitalism recognizes matter alone — the material cause in the Vedic philosophy. Further to this, it over-emphasizes the material means of production such as the tools, land, plants and machinery, etc. — what was treated as the ordinary causes in the Vedic philosophy. It is well recognized that this system tends to divide the society between at least two classes of people — one exploitative of the other. This system can never be a universally adoptable one because all cannot be exploiters. On the other hand, Vedic philosophy believes in all gaining wealth and prosperity. Many scholars are now predicting that capitalism will die sooner than later. If it does, the main cause of its death will be the fact that it implicitly ignores God and soul and their inter-relationship, which requires souls to exhibit a moral code of conduct.

Prajāpate tvad eva vāyū jatāni pari tā bahubha
Yatātāmat vajūmano astu rauram śāyam parāyo rayādūm
(तः 10.121.10)

Communism: The system of communism is based on matter alone — the material cause in the Vedic philosophy. It furthermore over-emphasizes the labor that is necessary to produce goods — what was treated as karma in the Vedic philosophy. Its characteristics of ignoring the soul and related human aspirations brought its collapse in less than a century of its history. Its overemphasis on karma left no room for appreciation that every human being has unique potentials to perform, not necessarily through the body but through the mind too, and also that every person has unique set of desires and requirements. The individualism was sacrificed for collectivism mainly because man was not seen as a conscious being with an individual soul.

Kurvanveśa karmāc ceyi vacchitam samā?
Evam tvaṁ nāyatheto sti na karma lipyate nare (Ya 40.2)

Cārvāka: This has been the popular belief for the last few thousand years of human history. Theoretically speaking, the system believes in the matter alone. But the system has most wide-ranging acceptance by the population because most of the population thinks that they believe in God and soul too, but in their day-to-day life they pay no attention to God and soul. Life basically revolves around its material needs. The result is there for everybody to witness — human society is constantly going through a complex chain of pain and suffering for the last few thousand years. No matter how hard we try, we get further away from peace and prosperity.

Yo' aitvato' parama rājasātya bhājayaetha na?
Udayaivā mādāra? (तः 10.9.2)

This includes a huge fraction of today’s population who consider themselves as firm believers in God. But a closer look will make it clear that they consider some imaginary entity
as God and have no understanding about the true God. This leads them to believe in the only Son of God, God's messengers, God's taking birth in human form, etc. Indeed, this huge population of the so-called religious people is the main cause of the existence of most of the aforementioned systems and their adherents.

*co aksare param vyoman yasmin deva adhi viśve ni eduh
Yastanna veda kim cā kari yati ya ittadvidusta ime samāsate (*v. 1.164.39)

Sa paryagyacchakramakāyamavatōamānasvīram
udidhamapāpaviddham
Kavirājā paribhū sa vayabhūyāthāthayata-arthaṁ
vyadadhiḥcācātātyaḥ samābhya? (Yv 40.8)

Neo-Vedantists: This is a recent phenomenon, and reflects the anti-climax that happens in any story if the things persist beyond the LAST POINT. The above ideologies prevailed for a significant length of time, and were based on negation of God. As a reaction, this has ultimately caused the existence of the neo-Vedantists a few centuries ago. While all the above ideologies ignored God one way or another, this ideology believes that there is one and only one entity and that is God. With the support of complex arguments, the adherents of this ideology tend to explain the beginning of creation and the present events taking place in the world. Last few centuries of India demonstrated her sharp downfall probably because this ideology cannot indeed make one believe that he is truly God and nothing but God. The visible world is merely an illusion. So, the common man needs to do nothing while undergoing the great illusory experience of life. While the adherents of this ideology think they are the greatest believers in God, they need to pay attention to a small question: Aren't they doing the greatest act of blasphemy by saying that Brahman is implicated with avidyā?

Ya? prākūto nimatō mahāvāka-irdhi jñāto babhūra
Ya-liśya avāxvapadācautapūpadā? kasmār dēnāya havi'ā vidhena
(Yv 23.3/25.11)

Drā suparā saujaya sakhyā sakhiṇām yākam pari 'asvajāte
Tayorāna? pippalam sudhotejasānaśāpyata ahū cākāūtha (*v. 1.164.20)

SIX BOOKS OF THE VEDIC PHILOSOPHY:
We have briefly described the six basic elements in the Vedic philosophy. These elements have been elaborated respectively in the six books, namely Śāṅkhya by Kapila, Yoga by Patañjali, Nyāya by Gāutama, Vaiśeṣika by Kaṇāda, Mīmāṁsā by Jaimini and Brahma Sūtra (also called Veda) by Bādarāyaṇa. These six books are called upānga, i.e. sub-limbus of the Vedic philosophy. This has been traditionally emphasized by calling the comprehensive study of the Vedas as śāṅkopānga (sa + anga + upānga), i.e. study of the Vedas through Vedaṅga (six disciplines of study: āśikā, āyātaka, nṛtika, chanda, kalpa and jyoti) and Upānga (the above-mentioned six books). This being the case, how could the six books be contradictory to one another? But the Dark Age in India during the middle-ages even divided our scholars depending on their specialization in one of the six books, and they began to see themselves as the followers of one of the six philosophies, forgetting altogether that the six books are part of the same Vedic philosophy. That is why they are called upānga of the Vedas - sub-limbus of the Vedas. A limb and sub-limbus has to be an integral part of the main body.

In the modern times, Maharāj Dayananda Sarasvatī (1824-'83) pointed out that there is no contradiction in these six books. He states in his Magnum Opus Satyārthā-Prakāsa (Chap. VIII): “In the context of the creation ... Mīmāṁsā says that nothing gets made without karma; Vaiśeṣika says that everything comes into being after a certain amount of time; Nyāya says that without material cause nothing can be made; Yoga says that without relevant knowledge nothing can be made; Sāṅkhya says that integration of particles is necessary to make anything; and lastly, Vedanta says that unless the maker makes, nothing can be made. Therefore, the creation comes into being due to the six causes. Those six causes have been examined in each book of philosophy. Therefore, there is no contradiction in the six books. As if six people together lift the thatched roof and place it on the walls of a hut, likewise the effect known as the creation has been explained by the six philosophers collectively.”

THE PROVERBIAL STORY:
As explained above, the divisions among the scholars of the said six books became so deep-rooted that the sensible members coined a proverbial story. The story is of six blind men touching and holding different parts of an elephant's body. Depending on who touched which part, he described the elephant as one like a hand-held fan, like a pillar, etc. And one among them was not totally blind but had a feeble eyesight, described the elephant as a black hilltop. Then they begin to quarrel among themselves because they do not agree on one description of the elephant. Whose fault is this? - Certainly not of the elephant, but can only be attributed to the ignorance of the blind men alone. The story mocks the reality about the followers of the six books. They forget that there is one and only one philosophy of the Vedas; they are bent upon describing it in their own myopic manner losing sight of the complete picture!

CONCLUSION:

1. Vedic philosophy is a comprehensive approach, which can give better meaning to the creation, human life and its objectives.

2. All the ideologies are based on a narrow view of a subset of the Vedic philosophy. They tend to over-emphasize one or two of the basic six elements and ignore others.

3. There is an urgent need to study, understand and propagate the true Vedic philosophy for better understanding among all sections of human society.