

Philosophy is the science of ethics...

## Hindu Philosophy Introduction

Among the schools of thought originating from India there are some that subscribe to the central Vedic tradition. These schools such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga are primarily inspired by the Vedas and are called orthodox schools whereas Buddhism, Jain and Carvaka which seem to oppose the Vedic pre-suppositions are called the heterodox ones.

This paper is a small introduction to some texts which remain a source and inspiration for the orthodox philosophical systems and for the Hindu world-view in general. The primary texts are the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagvadgita.

Beyond this paper, I suggest a look at the thematic concepts of Indian philosophy such as karma, maya, yoga, bhakti and jnana (discussed here), samsara, and moksha for the historical appreciation of Vedic thought.

The contribution of Indian philosophy to world philosophy has a role in exposing the possibilities and problems of life in this age of technology.

As an example of contemporary Indian philosophy, the lucid and original contribution of Gandhi is suggested.

## The Concept of Bhakti of the Rg Vedic Times And an Outline of Vedic Scriptures

### The Characteristics of the Bhakti

(around 1700 and 1100 BCE; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic\\_period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic_period))

Bhakti initially was devotion and sacrifice for a reward of relationships or for reception of good gifts from the gods. Bhakti was refined to devotion to a unified one God and less centered on selfish gain, but the longing for truth and the way of wisdom.

Jnana challenges actions which are laden with self-interest. Actions need to have an intrinsic virtue/truth in itself before the actions can be considered wise. Thus, jnana challenges bhakti in its sentimental emotional affection.

Abandon the ego in devotion to your authentic Atman self so you may be teachable, devoting in turn to the Divine (that is, Brahman) outside yourself. These terms simply mean for individuals to be devoted to self-realization and to be devoted to another. In short, don't be so self-absorbed that you are not teachable. Let your ego-centered "buts" be suspended long enough to be

teachable, to begin to understand from outside yourself instead of being trapped in the monkey-chatter of your own mind.

We are not meant to be islands unto ourselves: reverent respect to one's self, and towards others enable us to be both able and willing to seek the help of another. It is a self-surrender to divine love.

The heart and mind join dedicated in love and devotion to another: parents and children; the sexes; masters and servants (employer and employee); guru and disciple in a spiritual mentoring relationship for self knowledge separate from the body; devotion to the Divine aspect favoring our success in our destinies; love of God; God's bhakti for humanity.

Satisfaction, gratification, desire, passion, attachment, and showing honor all recognize God's charity, goodness, friendliness, and deep involvement in human affairs. Self-surrendering prayer and ritualistic gestures of symbolic offering, sraddha (faith) were all part of the Rg Vedic period. The gods were addressed personally in an anthropomorphic manner, as with a relation and honored guest.

The object of bhakti was eventually directed to a unified whole, an idealization of one God and non-anthropomorphic. Devotion to truth, to the way of wisdom, calm, controlled, quiet, patiently enduring, a contented disposition became the foci.

At this point we can see the parallels in the Hebrew scripture accounts. There had been many local gods, the Hebrews began to worship the one true God, three aspects of God came to visit Abram and Sarai as the early Vedic period had three aspects of God as well. By the time of Jesus, he was teaching about the way, truth, and light. As guru, he embodied these truths.

Anthropomorphism at its best encourages a personal relationship between the created and the Creator.

### **The Chief Features of the Gita's Standpoints of the Way (yoga discipline) of Bhakti:**

- a discipline, a way of life, a living process
- to influence and direct every aspect of our lives
- informs us of jnana and karma
- through bhakti there is a spontaneous attainment of knowledge and peace
- there is nothing easier nor more powerful, resigning actions to God
- beyond devotion to one's self (self-preservation, self-interest)
- relieved of desire for fruit of action but desire for union with the Divine
- instructs to be solely devoted to the Supreme Self, becomes entire focal point in life
- renounces selfish purpose
- repentance of an indulgent life
- devotion precedes the gift of grace
- worship of the Personal Lord is better than meditation of the Absolute
  - o harmonized

- o supreme faith
- exercise of even-mindedness and patience

Jesus also went beyond philosophical ramblings of “right” action and moved in power, transforming, liberating.

## The Traditional Meanings of Bhakti Highlighted by the Gita and Additional, Newer Meanings of Bhakti Introduced by It

### *Traditional*

- guru and shishya relationship of Nacketas (good over pleasant, knowledge over possessions) and Yama retained in the Gita as exemplified by Arjuna and Krishna
- teachableness – self-realization, trust of and devotion to another
- reverent respect
- connected to others, self surrender to another
- the heart and mind dedicated in love and mind to family (cousins) and gurus
- showing honor
- recognition of God’s friendliness and deep involvement in human affairs and goodness
- sraddhaàtrust, consistency and determination
  - àbeyond self-sufficiency
- Krishna participates in his devotees as much as they participate in him.
- Monotheistic as it upholds the Upanishad teaching of the absolute Brahman (reality).

### *Gita – newer, additional meaning*

- A more personal God than the impersonal Brahman of the Vedas and Upanishadic material as revealed in relationship between Krishna and Arjuna.
- Delivers from a death-bound existence and free from enmity to all creatures
- Loving relationship and devotion to one another
- A loving interchange of giving and receiving wise counsel
- Deeper devotion comes out of the depths of depression
  - o As with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane just before being hauled off to die a criminal’s death. One could say he was “sweating bullets” while he was fervently at prayer.
  - o Vedic devotion to family is challenged as it brings the distractions of hesitation, distress, and depression
    - ✚ Move beyond grief for the loss of loved ones
    - ✚ Let go of sentimentality and instead devote self to right action and duty
    - ✚ Devotion to what is worth following and pursuing
    - ✚ Supreme secret of love and devotion to Krishna instead of passion, fear and anger
    - ✚ Abandon attachment to the fruits of works (a real challenge to the Protestant work ethic. It is the foil highlight a particular characteristic and to bring it into balance).

## The Relationship of, and the Problematic Distance Between, Jnana-knowledge and Bhakti-devotion

### The Relationship Between Jnana and Bhakti

Jnana is knowledge of Brahman (Being-reality beyond the filters of perception) and of different kinds of karma (action). Jnana is the sword of wisdom which cuts doubt which is born of ignorance from the heart (Gita 4:42). It is the “desireless” nature of work, the understanding of action and inaction, recognizing the pain from wrong action. This jnana knowledge leads to spontaneous attainment of supreme peace, the attainment of wisdom (Gita 4:39). Sins or errors are washed away by wisdom (Gita 5:17) as sin’s influencing power over us is cut with the embracement of wisdom.

Being-reality (Brahman) is indestructible (Gita 2:12 eternal being) and is beyond death. Ultimate bhakti (respect) for Brahman makes sense because it doesn’t pass away like illusion or as temporary things do. This reverent respect is beyond knowledge, resting in the awareness that we cannot know everything, we just know in part. The Atman in us (the inner self, one’s essence, what keeps our bodies breathing) does not die. There is no dualism between the self and the divine, a deep rooted relationship with all things.

Bhakti is devotion, faith, and love. Bhakti and jnana join for the dharma of detached action, of both civility and civic duties required for functional relating. The goal is in the virtue and joy of the doing.

### The Problematic Distance Between Jnana and Bhakti

There was a childlike amazement coming out of the Rg Veda hymns of the 1500 BC era. There were generations of compositions of poets, leaders, and so on. The poser comes to us that maybe if there is a god, that god knows the value of life. Hymns and prayers, belief in gods and goddesses, and divine principles were part of the faith structure as human wonder sought expression to know what this existence is all about. The vidya knowledge of Brahman the absolute truth was sought, you might say the answers to their questions were sought as opposed to a-vidya, the secularized accumulation of knowledge.

Without jnana, our framework of devotion is limited to daily goals and wants. Without knowledge, life is not really lived. Socrates stated that an unexamined life is not worth living: do not take things for granted, start afresh with basic questions.

Daily goals are secondary to primary spiritual final goals:

- ✚ What is ultimately worth knowing?
- ✚ Why is it interesting?
- ✚ What is the final goal of knowing?

**Jnana** leads us to knowledge of being, vidya (clarity, correct knowledge), and knowledge of

bringing activity and inactivity together, a delightful activity of creative effort without worrying about the result. Do action without doubt or expectation. The prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was the prayer of non-doing, listening instead of talking, *being* in God and then *moving* in God.

**Bhakti** is the personal connection and commitment-devotion and emotional interaction in the guru-shishya relationship. More than dialogue, it is to devote oneself to the action of being creative and involved with life.

**Jnana**, however, is more impersonal. It is an emotional disconnection serving as a rudder on our emotional boat in the journey down the river of life. Yet, it lacks movement and purpose, a futility in action when this yoga predominates. Not competitive, jnana therefore needs bhakti to motivate one to one's vocation and dharma. We need to set our heart toward devotion and attentiveness to another.

**Bhakti** is the motor which moves jnana into right action with self-less concernfulness. A person who has stopped struggling with this has stopped living.

## The Four Vedas

1. Rg Veda is divided into 10 books of over 1000 hymns, prayers: the gods had natural characteristics- water, sun, wind, earth, and were initially polytheistic with a hierarchy, then henotheism, and monotheism
2. Sama Veda - spells
3. Yajur Veda - sacrificial hymns, mantras: the god of fire: the yajna ceremony using sacrificial fire in a container with spices on wood and clarified butter
4. Atharva Veda - charms, medical knowledge

## Each of the Four Vedas Have Four Sections

The sections in Classical Sanskrit may be chronological:

1. Sakhita (poems)
2. Brahmanas (prose)
3. Aranyakas (forest-texts)
4. Upanisads (sit-near)→ dialogues, the most philosophical with bhakti as the guru sits on the higher seat than the disciples. This is like Socrates and his students.

Three Among Many Gods

Shiva- destroyer

Brahma - creator

Krishna - governor - protector of the cows

} Three into one god in the Bhagavad-Gita

Humanity generally went through the plurality of God. The first name for God the Creator/Creative in the Hebrew Scriptures, Genesis chapters 1 and 2, is Elohim (feminine plural). For emphasis, the pronoun compliments Elohim, "Let us make humankind in our

image, in the likeness of ourselves..."Genesis 1:26, Complete Jewish Bible. The Creative is pregnant with possibility and potential and is forward moving into the future.

The goddess of earth was very important.

Indra, the king of gods, campaigns against evil.

Mithra (an Indo-Iranian god of light)

Vishvakarman was responsible for all the actions of the world: Vishva=world; karma=action.

The Greek logos means word, and law, and is parallel to Rta meaning order, sense, logic. The implicit message is that there is a reason behind every action, a scheme and lawfulness behind everything. Rta karma informs us that not even a god can escape karma. Bhakti devotion encompasses order, sense, and logic. It is not blind, but mindful.

Adaptation of Brock University Hindu Philosophy course notes, Prof R. Singh, Fall 1993.

Course textbooks:

Radhakrishnan and Moore, ed., *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*

Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Essential Writings of Mahatama Gandhi*

For further exploration, contemplate:

1. Hindu thought in the Age of the Vedas
2. Death-Contemplation and the Katha Upanishad
3. The Concept of Brahman in Brhadavanyaka Upanisad
4. Action, duty and Bhagvadgita
5. The concepts of satya and ahimsa in Gandhian thought
6. Gandhi and social development