**A Journey into the Pathways of Philosophy**

By Dr. N C Ramanujachary

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**Meaning and Content of the term “Philosophy”**

*(In the context of Western thought and Eastern viewpoint)*

Greek words *philos* and *Sophia* mean respectively ‘love of ‘and ‘Wisdom’ and thus the term philosophy primarily means ‘love of wisdom’ in daily action. Pythagoras first coined the term. According to him, men and women of the world could be classified into 3 groups: 1. those that love pleasure 2. those that love activity and 3. those that love wisdom. In his perspective, the end of wisdom is progress and perfection or salvation in terms of religious understanding. It can be noted here that his division of people into 3 classes corresponds to the 3 qualities(*Gunas*) of Nature that constitutes them, viz. Tamas, Rajas and Sattwa. The comparison is only to show that root ideas of wise men are always the same and similar to the Universal Ancient Wisdom Religion, the source of all.

Socrates claims that the purpose of philosophy is to enable the gain of self-knowledge, through conceptual clarity. Plato views that the discovery of reality or absolute truth, through dialectic, is the purpose of philosophy. It was Aristotle who suggested that the study of philosophy began with the notice of ‘awe and wonder’ around and ‘investigation of the causes and principles of things’ is the object. Totality of human knowledge tends to become philosophy. Hegasias, a Cyrenaic philosopher, felt that the endeavor of philosophy is to suggest ways and means of avoiding ‘pain’ in life. It was Neo-platonists that suggested the purpose of philosophy to become one with the Divine. For Descartes, philosophy is the elucidation of ultimate truth. It starts with pushing skepticism to its limit, when certainty of one’s own existence is revealed. Locke believed that philosophy provides an analysis of ideas stocked in our mind and the unpacking of those. Simon felt the purpose of philosophy is to bring about harmony to the world. Hegel said philosophy presents the absolute truth in absolute form. Classification and interpretation of the experience of humanity is the purpose of philosophy, according to Cousin. Spencer believes philosophy to be a synthetic discipline and is held together by universal principles. He observed Evolution to be a basic idea for this unity. For Bergson philosophy is basically an intuitive disciple, while Whitehead felt it should develop through imaginative generalization a categorical scheme applicable to all experience.

Historically, the Western Philosophy can be seen as under:

1. Greek Philosophy
2. Hellenistic-Roman period
3. Islamic philosophy period

4. Pre-Scholastic Jewish period

5. Medieval period

6. Renaissance period

7. Rationalists & Materialists (of England )

8.Analyticals and the like.

The above is only to illustrate how different philosophers have chronologically improved upon the theme and yet we see a derivation of ideas based on human development.

 No one of them is determinative and they necessarily stand as ‘spring board’ for our further effort. Humanism, Existentialism developed much later keeping in view the need of philosophical outlook touching the every day life and living, as also the progression in a wider and unique manner. Philosophy was and is always a granary of idea. Philosophy , In current times, it is reckoned as the quintessence of anything and everything available in manifestation. Philosophy of any subject of knowledge, including language and literature, is being developed and thus the discipline is becoming the ‘undercurrent’ of human being’s existence.

In the orient, the study of the discipline is much ancient and deep. India had its pre-Vedic philosophy, Vedic, Upanishad variations, purely radical materialistic studies, theistic presentations, personal and non-personal approaches. These will be dealt with separately.

 Chinese philosophy has the stalwarts like Confucius, Lao-Tze, Ying-yang schools and later Buddhistic presentations.

  Japan has its own schools and the same position with all nations and races. No segment of human population is devoid of philosophic thoughts, ever developing and moving to unimaginable heights.

 Historically, there have been travels of philosophers and philosophic thoughts between the Greece and Orient, East and West and the ideas got mixed, developed well and attempted to get at the ‘whole truth’ of everything connected with existence. Ultimately a realization has also dawned that there is neither East nor West but The Wisdom is One and the Same throughout the globe/ cosmos. Wisdom gets transmitted depending upon the needs of the people and their eligibility to receive that. Wisdom is co-genetic of manifestation, and philosophy is the outer expression of that. What is latent is being brought up gradually and sequentially. The Spirit of the Objective and subjective natures of existence are getting fused by philosophic knowledge.

 A very honestly, sincerely codified knowledge of Philosophy was available in India at a very early period of history, perhaps the pre-historic times; but for historical and geographical reasons that got eclipsed/ veiled and sidelined. Modern education and its systems introduced a sort of aversion, hatred and neglect among the Indians towards their own sciences and arts. Matters not easily understood are classed as ‘superstitions’ and left off without any probe into their being and structure. Indian way of “Mimamsa” encouraged such probe. It is only since 19th century that Orientalists got interested and studies such as Indology and Indosophy are coined indicative of the special studied connected with India . It is almost accepted today by all scholars of the world that Ancient Wisdom of the East, particularly India , because of its universality is the ‘mother of culture and civilizations’ of the world nations.

 Indian systems of philosophy always suggested that ‘textual knowledge’ of scriptures is not enough for total understanding of the subject. Interpretative faculty, reaching at the lower depths and high peaks of the knowledge is necessary. This is obtained by:

1. Constant application of the study
2. Perseverance of the goal.
3. Faith in accomplishment
4. A non-personal approach
5. Surrender to the Supreme wisdom

Scriptural text is the hard base upon which all ‘inquiry’ starts. Text is to be used as ‘spring board’ for all ideas. Extended meanings of the text and contextual interpretations come to the fore when the mind is ‘open.’ Spirit of Inquiry means this much.

 Philosophy, however much high placed it is for various reasons, must be looked as a factor resultant to ‘human thinking’, understanding and sequential developments thereto. As Wisdom is not confined or concluded, philosophy is too open-ended. There can be no conclusions whatsoever. Branches of study increase. Inter-disciplinary studies do bring in unpredicted, unanticipated results.

 To put it in different terms, analytical viewpoints of philosophic study can be reduced to the following:

1. Structure and Content
2. Import and. Goal
3. Purpose and. Ultimate.

Philosophy is the face of Wisdom (Jnana-mukha), it is the channel for its expression (Jnana-vahini). It is also the mirror of such expression (Jnana-darpana). It is the pathway to Wisdom and it is Wisdom itself.