

A Critical Review of Daya Krishna's Conception of Moral Intelligibility of the Universe: The Theories of Karma Rebirth and Purusārtha

Shikha Kumari

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067
E-mail: shikhas66o@gmail.com

Abstract—Objective of this paper is to provide moral intelligibility and justification for a person's suffering or pain. Generally, one tends to ask, "Why should I suffer or what is the justification of my suffering?" Different answers to this question are given or attempted in different civilizations. However, answer to this question is given in Indian civilization in a unique sense, stating that one's suffering is not brought by God or any transcendental power. Normally it is believed that either others are the cause for one's suffering or it is the result of an accident or chance. But all such cases do not give moral intelligibility or justification for what has happened to one. Moreover, it also doesn't explain one's suffering in extended form, which is associated with all sorts of natural disadvantage which one may suffer from birth. The Indian thought, consequently, searched moral justification for the fact of the one's suffering by postulating that one alone could be the cause of one's own suffering. And only that could make it morally intelligible and give some sort of moral justification for it. In this case, Indian theorists formulate the well-known theory of karma where one's suffering is the consequence of one's own action and no one else is responsible for it. The theory of karma is associated with theories of rebirth and purusārtha. This idea of moral intelligibility and justification of one's suffering and pain is discussed by Daya Krishna. I will also critically evaluate theories of karma, rebirth, and purusārthas by seeking answer to the question: can the theory of karma justify extreme cases of one's situation in case of rape, murder, and civil war?

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will explore Daya Krishna's conception of moral intelligibility of the universe which deals with the theory of karma. The theory of karma postulates that one's past life karma or action makes one responsible for all sufferings and pains of present life, which starts with the person's birth. Present life's action or karma sustains future life of sufferings and pains and gives an unstoppable chain of births. This unstoppable cycle of birth formulates into theory of rebirth. Only a human being has the power to stop this cycle by his/her karma. Indian philosophers have discussed the theory of purusārthas that is the aim of a human life at great lengths. Here, I will discuss Daya Krishna's conception of

moral intelligibility of the universe and the theories of karma, rebirth, and purusārtha. I will critically evaluate Daya Krishna's conception of moral intelligibility of the universe and the theories of karma, rebirth, and purusārtha.

Daya Krishna's Conception of Moral Intelligibility of the Universe and the Theories of Karma, Rebirth, and Purusārtha.

Daya Krishna explores the Indian Classical concept of karma and rebirth that provides one important perspective which is known as moral intelligibility of the universe. Which also deals with the question, what is the cause of someone's suffering and pain? The answer of that question is solved with moral intelligibility of universe in classical Indian philosophy which is different from the fact that what happens to one is only by a chance or destiny and brought by God or any external things. The answer to above question is morally unintelligible of the universe in sense of valuation perspective. Daya Krishna writes, "The postulation of a cause, even if one does not know it, is to save the cognitive intelligibility of the universe. But such a postulation alone cannot ensure its moral intelligibility as even if one were to know all the causes, genetic or otherwise, which have led to one's suffering, they only make the suffering cognitively intelligible but do not provide any moral justification for the fact that one suffers."¹

Indian classical thought, provides a moral justification of one's suffering by postulating that one alone could be the cause of one's suffering. This only could be morally intelligible and provides sorts of moral justification for it. One's suffering is consequence of one's action, there is no one else that can be responsible for it. If we accept that one's suffering is caused by other in sense of chance or destiny or anything else other than oneself would make one's experience meaningless on moral grounds. However, for Indian thinkers, the world will not be a non-moral or an immoral place because

¹ Krishna, Daya, 1997: 230.

they have admitted that what happens with one, is its own action's consequence. If appearances suggest contrary, they should be treated as only appearance or illusions.

This is explained through very well-known theory of karma in Indian traditions, formulated by Indian theorist to give experience of morally intelligible which always happens in theory. This theory provides very strange consequence that is applied by birth. As we know that, each human being is born with different advantages and disadvantages that are not only related to one's family, but it is also related to one's mind, body and disposition and temperament. These factors can be advantageous or disadvantageous to oneself. If one accepts these advantages or disadvantages happen by chance, destiny, heredity, or any other thing, then one accepts that universe is morally unintelligible and there is no justification for these distributions. However, Indian theory gives moral intelligibility of all these distributions as why should one be born in rich family or with such body and mind. Because whatever one has, given by one's birth, are consequence of one's own actions in some past life. The parents, genes and the environment are all, cause of occasion, although it is one's actions which provided the reason and justification for everything, good or bad that happened to one in this life, which is obviously consequence of past life actions. It becomes necessary to understand the postulation of past life in order to understand the advantage and disadvantage of moments at one's birth. The extensions of the postulation to a future life has already decided by this present birth. There does not seem any reason to cease this arbitrary cycle of one's action, or end of this life. Therefore, come into a being, the unending chain of actions arises and its consequence of providing the idea of unending chain of life in sense of births and deaths which are continuous feature of one's being.

Questions are raised as why only human being have endless birth and death and no other living being has this chain of birth and death like human being? What is the relation or difference between a human life and other living beings life? The answers to these questions are provided through the postulation unity of all living beings, where all living beings are included in the unending cycle of birth and death. And one can be born at any level whatsoever. No one is excluded from this process of endless birth and death neither human beings nor the world of animals or even plants. When one accepts the unity of all life. Other question arises as, what is the difference between human life and life at all other levels. We find the daring answer to this question as that only human level can initiate new actions that operates freedom in human life, which is different from other levels of life. This difference is explained by thinkers as "human life was the *karma yoni par excellence*, while all other lives were only *bhogayonis*, that is, where one could only enjoy or suffer the consequence of one's actions but not initiate any new ones."²

² Ibid., 233.

The centrality of human life provides the unique capacity for freedom to do right or wrong and good or bad. The distinguishing characteristic of human beings are *dharma* or the capacity to do the right action and achieve a good. This capacity only belongs at human level and is absent at all other levels. Once freedom is postulated to a self-conscious being, then the question is raised that what is the end of human action or the ends that ought to be peruse as human being. In this context, the answers are given in Indian tradition by the theory of the *purusārthas*, that make human life worthwhile or give meaning or significance to human life. The theory of the *purusārthas* as first formulated is supposed to have only three fundamental goals of life that makes it meaningful and significant. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* are three first formulated *purusārthas* which is added fourth *purusārthas* in form *moksha*. Later still add another *purusārthas* that known as *bhakti*. However, many thinkers have accepted only four *purusārthas*. There is huge discussion around these four *purusārthas*. There are some places where *artha* and *kāma* are seen as independent *purusārthas* and *dharma* and *moksha* alone confined.

In case, of independent development of *artha* and *kāma*, India has two major treatises known as the *Kāmasūtra* and *Arthashastra*. In case of *dharma*, human beings are distinguished from all other creatures of the world because it brings moral consideration in choices that a human being makes. *Dharma* is supposed to govern both *artha* and *kāma* at all levels and in all their different forms. Thus, *dharma* is the function of self-conscious being who is aware of other and of the future as well as of incompatibility between multiplicity of one desires. The self-conscious being seeks a harmony between these three aspects which one's actions always involves. Each of these dimensions makes claim which is called *dharma*. *Dharma* claims "obligations as one to do something and not to do something else, but the harmonization between the demands arising from these three dimensions may be regarded as a second order *dharma* co-ordination the *dharma* in three dimensions at the first level."³ In fact, there is a fourth dimension involved in self-consciousness which makes claim of its own. We generally talk about moral claim of others and not of one's own self. However, there is a dimension of the one's own self in which one has realized one's own obligation as in own self-consciousness one demands this obligation for others.

We find *moksha* as *purusārthas* is added later under the influence of *Buddhism* and *Jainism* which provided an unexpected turn in theory of *purusārthas* where *moksha* is attainable to all of them. The formulation of *moksha* is an ideal that is freedom from one's all suffering. The formulation of the ideal of *moksha* as *purusārthas* created a problem for all others *purusārthas*. *Moksha* cuts the root of life, including the moral life that is domain of *dharma*. The conflict between first three *purusārthas* and fourth *moksha* are written at large in

³ Ibid., 237.

Indian tradition. The efforts to integrate the fourth *purusārtha* in the scheme of the *purusārthas* took two different directions. One is regarding *dharma* where *dharma* becomes a necessary precondition of *moksha*. In this sense, one's consciousness is purified by the practice of moral virtues. And the possibility of liberation can arise and ultimately *moksha* is a state of consciousness that is undisturbed by anything and is self-sufficient in itself without needing anything else for the fulfilment of its own being. It has actualized for itself therefore where the ideal and actual is united completely.

The second attempt is to bridge the gap which suggests that the real problem of *moksha* is not with the life of action although it is related to desires of action in sense of pride in being its agent or author. On the contrary, "If the action was not being done from a sense of *egoity* or pride in being its agent or author, or if the action were done in the service of the Lord, then it would not affect one's consciousness in any negative way and would help rather than hinder it from attaining the state of ultimate freedom from all objectivity whatsoever"⁴. This desireless or fruitless action has been formulated in *Gītā* and is unmotivated action, which is not rooted in the desire for any consequence. Desireless actions are undertaken for the sake of Lord or for the maintenance of *dharma*. These strategies bridge the gap between the first three *purusārthas* and the fourth. However, the conflict and contradiction between them have worried the Indian mind continuously and thinkers have tried to prove that the conflict is not really a conflict although it remains unsolved.

The important aspect of *purusārthas* discussed in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* as "one who pursues any one of the *purusārthas* at the expense of others not only ruins himself but others also."⁵ We find that in Indian tradition all *purusārthas* are supposed to be in equal balance. One pursued at the cost of other always leads to the destruction of one's own self as well as others who are related to one in some way or the other way. We find other articulation given by Prof. K. J. Shah who has written that *artha* is not *purusārthas*, if it is not in accordance with *kāma*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. *Kāma* is not *kāma*, if it is not in accord with *dharma* and *moksha*. *Dharma* is not *dharma*, if it is not in accord with *moksha*. Equally, *moksha* is not *moksha* without the content of *dharma*. *Dharma* is not *dharma* without the content of *kāma* and *artha*. Thus, these four *purusārthas* are continued single goal of individual.

Critical Evaluation of Daya Krishna's Conception of Moral Intelligibility of the Universe and Theories of Karma, Rebirth, and Purusārtha.

After this discussion of theory of *karma* that provides moral intelligibility of universe, there still arise many questions in one's mind like, can the concept of *karma* justify extreme case of one's situation in case of rape, murder, civil war, or war from one country to another country? In this case, one can think these as disharmony of *purusārthas* which I have discussed above. But still these disharmonies cannot justify one's situation. As we cannot suppose that one is raped or murdered by her/his past life's consequence of actions. And if it is so then still it is unintelligible. In this case, one's suffering is always related to other's actions and decisions. We find that Daya Krishna did not see this aspect in theory of *karma*. Therefore, one does not always get suffering or achieve advantage or disadvantage as consequence of own action but also one achieves these advantage and disadvantage by the other's actions and decisions.

There is another problem regarding above question which relates to memory. Where one may suffer from birth in sense of born in poor family or physically disabled or such type of many other problems. One cannot justify that all these problems are due to consequence of one's past life's action, that actions which one does not remember.

REFERENCE

- [1] Krishna Daya, *Indian Philosophy: A New Approach*, Published by Sri Satguru Publications. 1997.
- [2] Krishna Daya, "Indian Philosophy and Moksha: Revisiting an old controversy" *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*. Volume II Autumn 1984. P 49-67.
- [3] Krishna Daya, *Indian's Intellectual Traditions: Attempts at Conceptual Reconstructions*, Published by Indian Council of Philosophical Research. 1987.
- [4] Krishna Daya *New Perspectives in Indian Philosophy*. Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001.
- [5] Krishna Daya, *Bhakti: A Contemporary Discussion—Philosophical Explorations in the Indian Bhakti Tradition*, (Ed.) With Mukund Lath and Francine E. Krishna, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi. 2000.
- [6] Krishna Daya. *The Art of the Conceptual; Explorations in a Conceptual Maze over three Decades*. Indian Council of Philosophical Research. New Delhi, in association with Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher PVT.LTD. New Delhi, 1989.
- [7] Krishna Daya, *Civilizations: Nostalgia and Utopia*. Jointly Published by Sage Publication India PVT. LTD New Delhi and Indian Institute of Advance Study Shimla. 2012.

⁴Ibid., 243.

⁵Ibid., 250.